

The Lost Stories of Warwick Deeping

Volumes I-IX

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VOLUME THREE

THE LOST STORIES OF WARWICK DEEPING

Cassell's
July 1914

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THE GREEN SNAKE

By WARWICK DEEPING



IT was Christmas Eve, and down in Carshot village the carol singers were going from house to house with lanterns and holly boughs, Tom Dallaway with his fiddle, and Cobbler Glass with his bassoon. Three inches of snow lay on the ground, and a full moon was shining. The carollers had linked up the Hall, the parsonage, Captain Stuteley's, and Lawyer Puckeridge's house with the chain of their footmarks in the snow, but there were no footmarks going to Isaac Massingham's stone house on the hill.

It stood there in the moonlight, a bleak, cold, wind-swept place, with a solitary light in one of the lower windows. The tumble-down outhouses looked over-burdened by the snow—in fact, part of the barn roof had fallen in that morning. A hundred yards away ran the high road, and where the Winterton road crossed it stood a gibbet. The gibbet showed black and clear against the snow, and something hung there, a tattered thing in chains.

Away over Heron Hill a post-chaise lay half in and half out of a ditch. The postillion and a young man in a black cloak were unharnessing the horses, while a girl, heavily muffled up in furs, stood in the snow and watched them.

The horses having been freed, the postillion and the man in the black cloak had time to examine the chaise. The postillion had taken too much hot toddy at Vampton, and he was still merry enough to accept the adventure philosophically. Not so the man in the black cloak.

"Don't you know a ditch when you see it, you fool!"

"Ditch! Lord, sir, where's the ditch? It's drifted full o' snow. Give us a hand here, sir."

The young man gave a hand, and they proceeded to try and right the chaise, getting their boots full of water in the process. But what was much more serious—the right fore wheel fell off the

axle-tree directly the side pressure that had jammed it was removed.

The postillion put his shoulders back and laughed.

"The linchpin's broke! I wish you a merry Christmas! I ain't had a linchpin break——"

The man in the black cloak caught him by the collar and shook him.

"What are you laughing for, you fool? Devil take it, we must be at Ravensmouth by six to-morrow morning."

"Devil take it, then, for you won't, sir. Leave off being so loving."

"Where's the nearest village, or smithy?"

The postillion rocked on his heels. Had he been sober he would have known that Carshot village lay two miles over the hill, but he had a fantastic Christmas fog upon him, and he swore as he loved virtue that there was no place nearer than Vampton.

"What! Ten miles back?"

"That be so, sir. Terrible parts these be. You can't smell fat frying on a fire for miles."

The girl in the furs interposed. She had a clear, full voice, a voice that was a little imperious.

"Send the man back to Vampton. He must bring a smith back."

"The fool's drunk."

"Drunk! Bless your heart, not me. I'll be in Vampton inside of the hour, lady, and back again before the gen'leman can kiss you."

The man in the black cloak gave him a thrust with his open hand.

"Here, off with you. It's worth good money if you can keep away from the beer mug. Ride like the devil."

"That's me, guv'nor. Tally-ho! I say. Yoicks! yoicks!"

He mounted one of the horses, and with such cheerful precipitation that he nearly fell off the other side.

"You can leave the other horse."

"They run better in wedlock, m'lord. Git up, I say."

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"Leave the other horse."

But the fellow was off like the drunkard that he was, the horse's hoofs sending a smother of snow flying.

The man in the cloak cursed him silently, and then turned with sudden tenderness to the girl.

"Dear heart, are you cold?"

She laughed, and her eyes shone under her fur hood.

"Not yet, John. I can't help laughing—"

"That infernal fool! I reckon that we had no more than five hours' start of them. To think that everything should be jeopardised by a sot like that! Besides, Barbara sweet, your men folk—"

She went close to him.

"I know they are not very gentle. Father is gouty, poor dear. Besides, John, I have a temper. If they do overtake us and try holding you with their pistols—well, I can hold a pistol, too. See, John?"

She brought out something that glistened in the moonlight.

"They can't exchange shots with a daughter and a sister. I'll not stand one of Roger's rages; I have had too many of them already."

He caught one of her gloved hands.

"Barbara, you are splendid! By George, it would be worth while being shot, just for this. Confound it, my boots are full of water!"

Her laughter rang through the clear air.

"What a tragic cry! Worthy of David Garrick. I do like you, John!"

"Dear heart!"

"Walk up and down."

"I want to see if I have any money ready. The smith will be wanting a couple of guineas. Hallo!"

He was thrusting his hands into his pockets, feeling himself, his face blank of a sudden.

"Heavens, where's my purse?"

"John, you haven't lost it?"

"By George, I have! I may have dropped it in that confounded ditch when we were fighting with the chaise."

He waded down into the ditch and began to grope desperately, and Barbara Flemming followed him, her face nearly as bleak as his.

"Oh, John!"

"Call me an unearthly fool, dear."

"Is it in the chaise?"

They climbed out of the ditch, Barbara's feet as wet as her lover's, and searched the chaise feverishly, but no purse was there.

They stared at each other helplessly. Nothing more tragic could have happened. The breaking of the linchpin was as nothing to it.

John Wargrave walked up and down, furious with himself.

"I have never had so much of the stuff that I could afford to be careless. And I go and lose fifty guineas just when fifty guineas are worth all the wealth in the world!"

She did not reproach him, neither did she weep, though this love flight of theirs looked like ending wondrously foolishly. For Barbara Flemming was a girl of spirit, and she loved John Wargrave with all her impetuous heart.

"I have my rings, John. I would even sell this ring of mother's."

He turned to her greatly moved.

"Barbara, I never loved you properly till now. By Heaven, I will not be beaten. Such a woman is worth fighting for."

"My dear, no Flemming was ever a coward."

"But it will hurt me to have to take your rings."

"Then let it hurt. I promise you I can heal that wound."

He took her face between his hands and kissed her.

"Sweetheart, you are cold. And you went down into that ditch. I wish to Heaven there was a house near. I'll go to the top of the hill and look."

He went, running over the snow, and had not the Squire's wood been in his way, he would have seen the lights of Carshot village twinkling along the slope of the hill. But he did see one solitary light of a solitary candle that burnt in old Isaac Massingham's house on the brow of Carshot Hill.

John Wargrave ran back to the post-chaise.

"There is a house less than a mile away. Christmas Eve and a fire!"

Now, in the stone house on Carshot Hill strange things had been happening. Two men, dressed in rough clothes, and wearing black masks, were leaning over

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the oak table in the room where burnt the light that John Wargrave had seen. They had drawn the musty curtains, and seemed in a rollicking Yuletide humour.

"Zounds, Tony, who'd have thought that the old rook kept so much in his strong-box?"

The other man scooped up a handful of guineas and let them fall clattering back upon the table.

"Lucky for him that we are no more than mummers. By George, he clawed my hair pretty badly. I thought he would have had my mask off!"

"What a jest that would have been! Parson Adam's son caught thieving an old man's money!"

"And the Squire's pride, the gallant captain in the King's Guards, helping him! But, Pierce, I wonder if we have read the old wretch too rough a lesson?"

"Nonsense, man! We'll let him out presently, take off our masks, and read him a sermon. He deserves it."

"As to it's doing him any good! Good gad, what's that?"

Someone had set the rusty iron knocker of the front door going, and the noise echoed through the house.

"I say, Tony, it won't do for us to be caught here. People might take it seriously."

"As seriously as old Massingham. Let's bolt for it. I wonder who that is at the door?"

"Come along, or we may find ourselves in a corner."

They beat a retreat, running down the long passage that led to the back door. It stood open, and these two mock-thieves dashed out across the snow-covered courtyard, and disappeared behind one of the ruinous outhouses.

John Wargrave was still plying the knocker, Barbara Flemming standing back and looking at the curtainless windows.

"There must be someone inside, John."

"Let's go round to the back."

The north side of the stone house was in deep shadow, but Wargrave saw footprints in the snow. They found the back door open, and a dark passage leading from it towards a vague glimmer of light. Wargrave stood in the entry, and hammered on the door with his knuckles. No one came.

"Queer sort of place."

He shouted.

"Is anybody there?"

But no one answered.

They were cold and hungry, and the door stood open.

"Ceremony be hanged. We'll go in first and explain afterwards. We may find a fire, anyway."

Wargrave walked along the passage towards the light, Barbara following close behind him. The door of the room was half-open. Wargrave pushed it back gently and stopped hesitatingly on the threshold.

It was as queer a room as any mortal could wish to see. The walls were of a vague brown, the floor bare and uncarpeted, the angles between the walls and the ceiling a mass of cobwebs. A wood fire burnt on the open hearth, a fire that had been fed with portions of a Jacobean chair and the legs of a broken stool. In one corner stood a great iron box with its lid resting against the wall. Dirty pewter plates, two or three cups and mugs, a ragged sirloin of beef, a dish of cold potatoes, and half a loaf were piled anyhow on an oak dresser.

A big table filled the centre of the room, and it was here that the candle burnt, standing in a common pewter candlestick. And this piece of base metal seemed to make the nobler stuff that glittered all about it more astonishing and grotesque.

"Look!"

He had laid a hand on Barbara's shoulder, and they stood there in the doorway like two children who had wandered by chance into some goblin house.

The oak table was covered with a veritable mountain of gold pieces, Dutch, English, French and Spanish. A good sackful might have been emptied out there, and each piece was as bright and as polished as though it had just come from the mint. The candlelight flickered on the hoard of gold that seemed to have been left to take care of itself in an empty house.

John Wargrave's mouth was a hard line. His eyes looked queerly at the pile of money.

"Are we asleep?"

She drew closer to him.

"John, this house makes me feel cold."

"I suppose the stuff is real."

He walked up to the table, plunged his

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hand into the mass, and let the glittering coins jingle back to join their fellows.

"Real enough."

He laughed a queer, restrained laugh.

"We can use the fire if we may not touch the money. What sort of mad house is this? A miser's Christmas Eve? Come and sit down."

He picked up a Dutch chair and set it before the fire.

"Why, the man burns furniture! Look at that! Take off your shoes, dear."

"John, I think I would rather be out in the snow."

"Not till you are dry, sweetheart. Well, this is the queerest house that ever I set foot in. I should like to see the thing that lives in it."

Wargrave brought up a stool. He found some logs in an old cradle in one corner of the room, and he piled them on the fire. Barbara had taken off her furs and her shoes and was drying her stockings and her petticoat, showing two neat feet and ankles. Her lover unlaced his wet shoes and, seating himself on the stool, followed her example.

"Nothing like making oneself at home."

But they were ill at ease in that strange, silent house, where someone had left all that pile of money upon the table. Wargrave had looked to the priming of his pistols. He kept glancing over his shoulder at the glitter of gold upon the table.

"I wonder if that fool of a postillion has reached Vamptown!"

They were both thinking of that lost purse, and there, three feet away, lay the magic stuff that they needed. Just ten of those gold coins would make all the difference in the world to them for the moment.

Wargrave was restless. He stood up, staring at the money. He glanced suddenly at Barbara Flemming.

"I shall take a handful of that in three minutes."

"John!"

"By Heaven! Am I to chance losing you because of such a scruple? I tell you, Barbara, I could play the highwayman to-night. Besides, I can pay it back."

"We might leave a ring," the girl suggested.

His eyes flashed to her with gratitude.

"Dear, thanks from my heart for that. Supposing I pick out twenty guineas."

He had taken a step towards the table, and Barbara was drawing off one of her rings when they heard the sound of a door opening somewhere in the house. A queer, shuffling sound came along the passage, jerkily, and with a suggestion of blind haste, as though some sightless thing were groping its way along through pitch darkness. Wargrave drew back to the fire, facing the doorway, his hand on one of his pistols.

The thing came panting to the half-closed door, and stumbled forward into the candlelight. It was a man, with his head muffled up in a sack that had been lashed over his shoulders, and his wrists bound together with a piece of stout cord.

"My money—my money!"

He tried to free his head from the sack, but his bound hands could not manage it, and his contortions made him look like a cat that had got its head caught in a milk jug.

"Let me help you, sir."

The man staggered back against the dresser.

"Rogues! Are you there? You shall not have my money."

Then Barbara Flemming spoke to him.

"Sir, there are no thieves here. We are two travellers, whose postchaise has broken down. We came here for the sake of the fire, but could make no one hear."

"What! A woman's voice! Good friends, tell me what is there—on the table?"

Wargrave smiled cynically.

"A good sackful of gold."

"God be thanked—God be thanked! Uncover my eyes, sir; I cannot see."

Wargrave took a knife from the dresser and freed him, pulling the sack off to uncover the head of an old man with white hair and a lean face that was all cracks and wrinkles.

Isaac Massingham did not look at his deliverer. His first glance was towards the table. He threw up his hands with a snarl of exultation, plunged forward, and buried his face in the pile of gold.

"Tell us what has happened to you, sir."

The old man straightened suddenly and stared at them with grudging mistrust.



"They saw his hand shake and his eyes grow big behind his spectacles"

"Presently. I must see if it is all here—all the money—all the good money," he said suspiciously.

He seized a stool, dragged it to the table, sat down, and began to count the money, arranging it into little piles. His finger nails were nearly an inch long and indescribably dirty. He was so utterly intent upon his work that he appeared to forget the presence of these strangers in the room. He counted in a whisper, his lips moving, his head nodding up and down.

John Wargrave looked at Barbara. There was scorn on both their faces, scorn for this old wretch who dabbled his dirty hands in this hoard of gold.

He was extraordinarily quick over his counting, and the table was like a parade-ground with the little regiments of coins

marshalled in order. His eyes grew brighter; his lips moved more rapidly. The last coins were counted out. He jumped up with a cry of delight.

"All there—all there! Not one coin missing. A miracle, a miracle!"

John Wargrave's patience was exhausted.

"I think, sir, we must be part of the miracle. Have you had thieves here?" he asked.

Massingham turned to them with vindictive eyes.

"Ha! they shall be caught, and hanged. Two men in masks, rough fellows. They crept in and seized me, tied me up, and shut me in the cellar. There was a gag in my mouth. It took me an hour to get on my feet."

"I must have scared the fellows away

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when I knocked. Did you hear me knocking?"

"I thought it was the scoundrels looking for more money."

Massingham could not keep his eyes from the piles of coins upon the table. He went and hung over them, smiling.

Wargrave's mouth hardened.

"Let me say, sir, that we are much obliged to you for the use of your fire."

"You are welcome. It has saved you paying the man Price at the 'Blue Boar.'"

"That is a most generous conclusion, sir. Have you any food or wine in the house?"

"Price will sell you food, sir, at the 'Blue Boar.' It is but a mile down the road."

Wargrave drew himself up. He had to bite his lips to keep the words that rose to them, words that he could not speak before Barbara Flemming. He turned to her, with grim eyes and a queer, cold smile.

"This gentleman, Barbara, has forgotten to be human in becoming a beast. Yet I think I will do business with him. Excuse me, sir."

Old Massingham was gloating over the money and preparing to return it to his strong box.

"Excuse me, sir; we are travellers, our post-chaise has broken down, and I have had the misfortune to lose my purse. It is absolutely imperative that this lady and I should be at Ravensmouth by six o'clock to-morrow morning. I am going to ask you to lend me twenty guineas."

Massingham's chin came round very sharply.

"I never lend money, young man."

"Not even on Christmas Eve?"

"What's Christmas Eve to me?"

"Not even to two people who are running away to be married?"

Wargrave spoke ironically, but the words had an unexpected effect on the miser. His lower lip drooped; his eyes fell into a visionary stare; the fingers of his right hand plucked at the frayed sleeve of his coat.

Suddenly he looked hard at Wargrave, and answered him with a curious air of defiance.

"No."

"Wargrave shrugged his shoulders, but his eyes were dangerous.

Barbara interposed.

"If you will not trust us, though we did not touch your gold, perhaps you will buy this ring from me. We must have money."

She held out the ring. It was a gold band set with emeralds in the form of a snake, and the snake's head was a single ruby.

"It is a valuable ring; it was my mother's."

She dropped the ring into the old man's palm, and he went nearer to the candle. He pulled out a pair of spectacles, perched them on his nose, held the ring towards the candlelight and about three inches from his nose.

They saw his hand shake and his eyes grow big behind his spectacles. He seemed extraordinarily and absurdly agitated.

"Why, it is—my—ring."

"Your ring?"

"Barbara, the old beast is mad; his claws want to clutch everything. Here, sir, hand it over."

Old Massingham ignored him.

"It is my ring, I say. I have not seen it for thirty years."

"Pardon me, it is my ring, sir. It belonged to my mother."

Massingham tilted his spectacles on to his forehead, pattered forward, and caught Barbara by the sleeve. He was extraordinarily excited.

"Young woman, who are you?"

"My name is Barbara Flemming."

"Flemming, Flemming—Joan Flemming's daughter?"

"Yes."

He peered into her face, his lips working.

"A miracle! Why, to be sure, you are Joan Flemming's daughter. And what are you doing with this young gentleman, in a post-chaise, at this time of night?"

Wargrave's temper gave out. He stepped forward and laid a hand on Massingham's shoulder.

"What the deuce has it to do with you, sir? Your meanness does not give you the right—"

The miser turned to him excitedly.

"It has everything to do with me, young man. No, I am not mad. Let me get back a bit. Don't fluster me, young man, and don't call me mean;

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I'm generous, and I'm poor. Barbara Flemming, Joan's daughter. Thirty years ago. And who are you, sir?"

Wargrave looked down at him sarcastically.

"My name is John Wargrave, a man with an old name, but no money."

Massingham clapped his hands, and broke into an absurd chuckle.

"A poor man—a poor man!"

"It seems to amuse you, sir."

"Go on, Mr. Wargrave, go on. It delights me. And you fell in love with Miss Barbara Flemming?"

"Indeed, sir."

Barbara broke in, laughing.

"He has been guilty of that, Mr. —"

"Massingham, Massingham. And your father, Miss Flemming, wanted you to marry a certain rich man."

Barbara and Wargrave exchanged glances.

"How do you know that, Mr. Massingham?"

He was transfigured. His eyes twinkled; colour had come into his cheeks.

"Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, I'm no fool. And so you have run away with Mr. Penniless Wargrave, and left Dan Flemming and the rich man in the lurch?"

"Yes."

Old Massingham was convulsed. He snapped his fingers, jigged about the room, and crowed with exultation.

"Bravely done. One for you, Dan Flemming! The daughter has dared to do what the mother shirked doing. History corrects itself. Why, bless me, I feel twenty years younger."

Wargrave was thinking of time and of old Dan Flemming and his turbulent sons galloping hard to spoil the adventure.

"All this is very amusing, Mr. Massingham, but what has it to do with your buying that ring?"

Isaac Massingham beamed on him, and came and patted him on the shoulder.

"Just the temper I was in—just the same. Why, Mr. Penniless Wargrave, I was a poor man thirty years ago, and I loved Miss Barbara's mother. That was the very ring I gave her. We were to clope, though her father had half

promised her to Dan Flemming, who owned thirty thousand acres."

He turned suddenly to Barbara, and a new softness came upon him.

"Your mother wrecked my life, my dear. I had the coach ready, all the money I could lay my hands on in my pocket. I waited five hours on a winter night. She never came. Yes, her courage failed her; she married Dan Flemming."

No one spoke for a moment. Then old Massingham went on.

"Your mother was a sweet thing, my dear—too gentle to stand out for her own heart. I was angry then, but the anger has passed. She kept that ring, and I never wished it back again."

He held the green snake with its ruby head in his palm, and looked at it wonderingly. Some of his better and more human self had returned.

Then Barbara Flemming spoke.

"You will keep that ring—my dear mother's ring, Mr. Massingham."

He raised his eyes slowly to hers.

"Thank you, my dear; but you shall have something in return."

The exultant and chuckling mood had returned. He ran to the strong box, pulled out two old leather purses, one of which had a belt that could be strapped about the waist. He laid them on the table, and with a sweep of the hand sent twenty piles of gold scattering over the table.

"Hallo, Mr. Penniless Wargrave! Hallo!"

His eyes gleamed and twinkled, and he shook his white hair.

"It is my turn to hold the cards against Daniel Flemming. Look—look!"

He took the gold by handfuls and poured it into the two capacious purses until they would hold no more.

"Money, eh? Money for postillions, and sea captains and innkeepers! Bless me, here's life come again. Buckle on the belt, Mr. Penniless Wargrave; buckle it on, sir, and put the other purse in your pocket."

Wargrave flushed to the temples.

"A loan, sir?"

"Loan? Zounds, don't be a fool, young man; a present, I say, to you and Miss Barbara Flemming. And now about that postchaise, sir, about that

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postchaise. They must not catch you. I'll get my hat and cloak."

He seized the candle and ambled off, leaving them standing there by the fire-light, astonished, touched. Barbara's eyes had a glimmer of tears in them.

"Oh, John dear, if——"

He drew her to him, and she laid her head on his shoulder.

"Mother had not much happiness, dear. And to think that this poor old thing may have been like you."

Wargrave laughed softly.

"Nothing shall make me grow like Mr. Massingham," he said.

The miser returned. He had put on a battered old cocked hat and a black cloak, and had stuffed his thin legs into a pair of horseman's boots.

"Come!"

He was greatly excited, and in a kind of dread lest the adventure that he was financing should go astray.

"What about all this money, sir?"

"Ah, the money!"

They swept it up, tumbled it into the strong box and locked it in.

Old Massingham went at an extraordinary pace over the snow, in spite of his huge boots. The moon was up, and the white country clear and brilliant under a sky of silver. The sound of a hammer at work reached them from the road.

"They are at it there."

"Ravensmouth by six. We were to have gone to Ravensmouth."

They found the smith at work there, the postillion helping him, two fresh horses standing by, with nose-bags to comfort them. The postillion was sober, but by no means ready to admit that he had ever been fuddled.

"The job's done, sir. And what about this?"

He held out something to Wargrave.

"My purse!"

"You left it on the table at the 'Black Horse,' sir. Lucky we had that spill, sir."

Old Massingham broke into thin, piping laughter.

"I never lost my purse, Mr. Penniless Wargrave, even if I lost my lady."

Wargrave began to unbuckle the belt with the leather purse attached to it.

"I can return you your money, sir."

Old Massingham was angry.

"Sir, I would call you a fool, but for Miss Barbara Flemming here."

The wheel was on, the horses harnessed. Wargrave gave the smith five guineas and shouted to the postillion.

"No other folk on the road? No one came into Vampton while you were there?"

"Not a living soul, sir."

Old Massingham stood to help Barbara into the postchaise. His figure suddenly assumed an attitude of tender gallantry.

"May you be happy, my dear."

She turned and kissed him.

"From my mother and from me," she said.

Wargrave held out his hand to Isaac Massingham.

"You have been a good friend, sir."

"Young man, mind not to lose that money."

They were off, the postillion cracking his whip, Barbara leaning out to wave to Isaac Massingham.

"What a night of adventures, John!"

She leant back in her furs, snuggling up close to him. His arm went round her.

"Thank God, you have had the courage, dear, to run away with a poor man."

The blacksmith had shouldered his tools and started on his ten-mile walk back to Vampton, but old Isaac Massingham stood in the middle of the road and watched the chaise go over the hill to Carshot village. And presently he followed it, snapping his fingers and chuckling as he went on.

"They will come this way," he said; "they will come this way."

Landlord Price and his gossips were keeping Christmas Eve in the "Blue Boar" public parlour when Isaac Massingham walked in. The air was thick with tobacco smoke, and through the haze showed a circle of mute and astonished faces.

Mr. Massingham seemed amused.

"Good evening, gentlemen. A happy Christmas to you, gentlemen. Mr. Price, I shall count it a favour if all these gentlemen will drink a dozen bottles of best wine at my expense."

Cobbler Glass whispered behind a hand.

"Lor, the old flint's drunk!"

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•But Mr. Massingham was very sober. He brought out a handful of guineas.

"And, Mr. Price, that private parlour of yours that looks out on the street. I expect friends to pass. I wish to hire that parlour for the night. Have a fire lit and send me in a bottle of wine."

Isaac Massingham kept watch all night at that parlour window, wrapped in his old cloak, while a huge fire blazed on the hearth. All Carshot had gone to bed, save Mr. Price, who had doubts as to Mr. Massingham's sanity, and did not want the house burnt down. These two old men and the moon kept watch.

It was four in the morning when Isaac Massingham pricked up his ears. Three horsemen pulled up outside the "Blue Boar," and Massingham could see their jaded horses steaming in the cold, frosty air.

"Hallo, there! Hallo!"

One of them dismounted and hammered at the inn door.

Isaac Massingham found Mr. Price taking down the bar.

"Your friends, sir?"

"My friends, I think. Let me welcome them."

The door opened, showing them a red-faced young man in a black beaver and green cloak.

"Horses, landlord; fresh horses. Name any price you please."

Isaac Massingham walked out past the young man to a stout gentleman mounted on a grey horse.

"Dan Flemming, is that you?"

"Who the devil are you, sir?"

Isaac Massingham laughed.

"It is four in the morning, Mr. Flemming. It is twenty-seven miles to Ravensmouth. Your daughter and her bridegroom passed here about eleven o'clock last night. They sail at six. Moreover, sir, Mr. Price here has no fresh horses; I have hired them myself."

Mr. Price stared.

"Excuse me, Mr. Massingham."

Isaac Massingham went close to him.

"Price, I'll hire those horses of yours for two hours at a hundred guineas, and here's the money down."

The man on the grey horse broke in furiously.

"Who the deuce are you, sir, pushing in here?"

Isaac Massingham laughed aloud.

"You don't remember Isaac Massingham, Dan Flemming? You cheated me out of a wife, and I have helped to cheat you out of a daughter. A merry Christmas to you, sir; a right merry Christmas!"

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THE MOTHER

By WARWICK DEEPING

SHE was a very slim little woman with nice soft brown hair, quiet eyes, and a sensitive mouth. The table was covered with cut flowers and vases, and she was arranging the flowers in the vases while she talked to the girl who sat on the end of the Chesterfield sofa.

"No, I have decided not to go to Tilbury, Gwen. I shall just stay here, and meet him at the station. Men don't like to be fussed. And I want to have everything ready. It is strange to think that I haven't seen him for two whole years."

The girl on the sofa watched Mary Gaskell with a pair of wise blue eyes. Her face and hands were brown, and she was too strongly built to be completely feminine. She looked at life with a certain unsexed frankness. A man of forty chastened by experience would have admired her. A mere cub would have left her on the other side of the room, perhaps because some raw instinct warned him that he might be mishandled.

"I wonder if Roy has changed?"

The mother glanced at her with innocent surprise.

"Changed? Why should he change? Of course, he is older, and he has seen more of the world. How can a mere boy spend two years in India without developing? But it will be the same Roy."

She was silent a moment, and smiling as she put the last touches to a vase of carnations.

"Do you know, Gwen, dear, I feel so young. You wouldn't think that I am fifty-two, would you? Roy and I were always such chums. I shall have him for six whole months, and I have made such plans. Yes, I've been saving up for this for his holiday."

Her face was radiant.

"I haven't been able to sleep properly for a week," and she laughed. "I wonder if he feels like that? Oh, and I want to show you his room. I have had it done up, and I've bought a new carpet."

Gwen followed her upstairs. The girl

was in a serious and sceptical mood, not because she had no warm blood in her, but because she knew Roy's mother so well, and loved her very deeply. She remembered that this lonely woman had been living for that boy gone soldiering in India, that she had been counting the days since she had heard that he was coming home on leave. Mary Gaskell was utterly and terribly happy. Gwen Richardson could not escape from the haunting thought that a mother's love is so often fated to suffer bitter pain.

Mary Gaskell threw open the door of the room with all the pride of anticipation. It was very pathetic this room. Hours of forethought had been spent on it, all the little details studied lovingly.

"Don't you like that carpet?"

"I do. It is just the shade of rose that pleases me."

"And, you see, I have had the bed curtained off so that Roy can use the room as a den if he wants to be alone. I bought that club-chair last week. Do try it."

Gwen tried the chair. It was low, and ample and sumptuous, padded a foot deep, and to the tune of a good many guineas.

"Perfect. You'll spoil him."

The mother smiled.

"Oh, no. It makes me so happy. And Roy never showed any signs of being spoilt."

Gwen Richardson had her doubts, but she did not confess to them.

It was a radiant May evening when the cab called at Mrs. Gaskell's villa to take her to the station. She was flushed, and all a-thrill like a young girl. In the gardens along the road red may and laburnum were in bloom, and beds of tulips shone like lamps of red and gold where the evening sunlight touched them. Thrushes were singing, and Mary Gaskell's mood was theirs.

The cab drove through the town just as the shops were lighting up. Sandbourne

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was gay, prosperous, yet a little plutocratic. The streets were busy; the gongs of the trams clanged cheerfully; at the corner by the station the flower-seller was still at her post.

Mary Gaskell stopped the cab and bought a bunch of violets, paying the woman double.

"My son is just home from India, and I am going to meet him."

The flower woman was an old friend of hers, and she beamed.

"Take a bunch for 'im, m'am. A present from old Sarah."

Mary Gaskell found herself on the platform. She walked up and down, and kept glancing at the clock. There was a tremor of exultation in her throat.

She stopped and questioned a station porter.

"Is the London train late?"

"No, mum. She's been signalled from May Hill."

She listened for the roar of the train in the tunnel. A light appeared, a friendly, blinking eye. Mary Gaskell stood still, her right hand clasping the stalks of the violets very tightly. Her mouth was quivering, and her eyes were all soft light.

The train drew up. Doors were opening. And suddenly the mother darted forward with a quick catching of her breath.

"Roy!"

She had seen him before he had seen her. He turned, with the imperturbability of a young man who had a horror of appearing in a hurry.

"Hallo, mater, how are you?"

Her hands went to his shoulders, and she put up her face to kiss him.

"Oh, my dear, it is really you!"

His eyes did not answer hers. He kissed her rather perfunctorily, and began looking about for a porter.

She was just the slightest bit dashed, and her sensitive face lost some of its radiance.

"You must be tired, dear."

"Oh no. Here, porter, my luggage is in the back. A portmanteau and two suit-cases. Take this bag with you; there's a hat-box in the rack. Gaskell, that's the name."

"Yessir."

"I've got a cab, Roy."

"We'll have a taxi."

"But the cab's waiting, dear. I ordered it from Templeman's."

"Oh, all right! Hasn't old Templeman got rid of his crocks yet? They always were antediluvian."

Mother and son stood a moment under a gas lamp, waiting for the luggage, and Mary Gaskell's eyes could not leave her son's face. He was a tallish fellow, spruce, good-looking in rather a lifeless way. A little tight moustache covered his upper lip. His eyes were too hard and too staring, his voice too throaty and self-assured.

"Hang the chap, what a time he is!"

"Hungry, dear?"

"So so. Here he comes."

They drove through the soft dusk to that commonplace little villa, ruling its strip of garden among villas equally commonplace and unemotional. Roy Gaskell sat and stared out of the cab window, and talked to his mother as though he were talking to some stranger he had met casually in a drawing-room. He was utterly unalive to all the self-smothered tenderness that yearned towards him from the slim figure at his side. She wanted to hold his hand, but was telling herself that men hated to be fussed.

"Here we are, dear."

Roy Gaskell was not a creature of subtle impressions, but he was depressed by the villa's smallness and by its inconclusive situation. It struck him as a poky little place. He had come back a pretentious young man; other fellows' people had town houses and places in the country; it annoyed him that he could not boast of such things, that this home of his was so "beastly suburban."

"I'll show you your room, Roy."

"All right, mater; I know the way. Don't bother."

But she was half-way up the stairs, and he had to follow her. She threw open the door with the air of a mother discovering a Christmas tree to a boy of children. A lamp with a pink shade had been lit; the room looked very dainty and comfortable.

Roy Gaskell walked in, glanced casually at the big chair, and tossed a handbag on to the bed. He appeared to see nothing, to be aware of nothing singular. The room was just a room, nothing more.

"You see, dear, you can draw that cue."

The Mother

lamp and shut off the bed. I thought you'd like to use the room as a den."

Her face was pathetically expectant.

"All right, mater. I'll just have a wash. Ask the fellow to carry my things up here."

She retreated, grievously disappointed and trying to laugh at herself for feeling so.

Roy Gaskell ate the dinner that had been prepared for him; he did not say that he enjoyed it, but he did ask for whisky, and there was no whisky in the house. His mother blushed as though she had sinned. And that dinner was to have been a kind of sacramental meal; she had planned it all herself. It was very absurd—she confessed—that she should have expected him to be impressed by it; probably it may have seemed a very ordinary sort of meal to a man used to dining at the mess.

When he had drunk his coffee and smoked a cigarette he showed a restlessness that was not lost upon his mother. She was waiting for him to talk to her about innumerable things. She told herself that he was tired.

"If you would like to go to bed, dear—"

He stared.

"No, thanks, mater. If you don't mind I'll just run out and have a look round. Anything on at the theatre?"

She looked at him breathlessly.

"I really don't know, dear."

"I'll go—and chance it. I say, have you got a latchkey? Don't sit up, mater."

He never asked her to go with him; it did not even occur to him that she would care to be asked. She heard the front door close. He had left her alone the very first evening of his return. She got out her fancy work and tried to busy herself with it, but she was wounded; the stitches went all awry. She waited, and waited, and presently went to bed.

Roy Gaskell had been at home a week before he met Gwen Richardson. As girl and boy they had been comrades, and in some ways rivals. Gwen had recollections of a squabble that had ended in a rough and tumble, and she remembered how the boy had been shocked and disgusted at her strength. He had left for India with the idea that he was in love with Gwen Richardson, but since then he

had discovered "woman" in a far more exuberant and flaunting intimacy.

"Well, Roy."

"Hallo! Gwen."

She had seen that he had wished to pass her by, pretending to be vastly interested in a motor-boat that was running towards the harbour. He looked very annoyed, and then hid his annoyance behind a starched cheerfulness. Gwen had trapped him in the narrow space between the edge of the sea-wall and the bandstand close to the pier.

They stared at each other, and Gaskell was asking himself how he had managed to think the girl pretty.

"Funny I shouldn't have seen you before."

"Is it? I have been to your place several times."

"Yes, I believe the mater said something about it."

"But you always happened to be out."

There was a severity about her that puzzled Roy Gaskell, but when he had provided himself with a possible explanation, he was tempted to laugh. So the silly fool had been sentimentalising about him! Perhaps she had kept his photo in her bedroom!

"Sorry, Gwen. You and the mater must be pretty thick."

She looked at him steadily with her calm and rather merciless eyes.

"I am very fond of your mother. Often she is very lonely."

"Then why does she live in such a beast of a place, full of old women and retired tradesmen. Besides—"

"Well?"

"I don't believe the mater really minds being alone. Some people don't, you know. She potters about in the garden, and makes tea-cloths, and reads. Jolly weather, isn't it? I had a bathe this morning, and swam as far as the point. I am just off to see the secretary of the 'Downs' Cricket Club; may be glad for me to play for them this season."

He was growing fidgety. His eyes kept looking past her, and he was waiting for her to free him.

"You've changed, Roy—somehow, I had a presentiment that you would be different."

He laughed

"I was a raw kid when I went out. India makes a man of one. Well, so

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long, Gwen. I shall miss my man if I don't hustle."

She let him go, and then, obeying a sudden impulse, turned and followed him. The whole "atmosphere" of the man had a special significance. She noticed the crease in his trousers, the way he carried his cane and turned out his elbows with a superabundance of youthful self-satisfaction. Every detail was of vast importance—the handkerchief tucked up his sleeve, the tint of a tie, the set of his hat.

Gwen Richardson stopped abruptly, and leant against the railing of the esplanade.

"I thought you were fibbing, my friend."

She had seen him gravitate in the direction of a flamboyantly dressed young woman who was lolling in a deck-chair under a pink parasol. Master Roy's hat came off with *empressement*. There was a vacant chair near. He drew it up, and sat down as though he had reached the ultimate goal of the morning. Gwen Richardson moved away, while Mr. Gaskell was fully occupied with the mature young woman under the pink parasol.

She tried to be fair to Roy as she considered the situation. She was not in love with him; pique did not enter into her attitude towards Roy Gaskell. It was her first experience of the blind and buoyant selfishness of youth, and it angered her and made her sad. She knew that months of expectation had been lavished on this man-boy's home-coming, and already she had felt the pain that Mary Gaskell's sensitive tenderness was bearing.

Roy's mother was just a woman who provided him with meals and additional pocket-money. He took everything as a matter of course, went his own way, used her but was not hers. Gwen had watched that look of wistfulness increase on the mother's face. Mary Gaskell had given her boy to the world; and the man who had returned was a stranger—a stranger who gave her a little casual conversation, but not a shred of the self that she had created; and suffered in creating.

Gwen kept house for her brother, a young doctor who had taken over his father's practice in Sandbourne. Brother and sister were the very best of comrades; they resembled each other in physique and in character, the brother

being sturdy, with a good virile head upon strong shoulders, keen eyes, and a humorous but laconic mouth.

He came in late for lunch that morning, a successful man cheerfully humbled. Gwen was lighting the spirit lamp under the coffee machine, frowning slightly with an air of preoccupation.

"Sorry to be late——"

"I have had my lunch, Tom."

"That's right. I have got to motor over to Pilstead this afternoon. Gave to come——"

She looked up suddenly.

"Could we take Mrs. Gaskell?"

"Of course. I can drive and leave Parsons at home. But won't she be taken up with Master Mars?"

Gwen leant forward with her elbows on the table.

"I met Roy this morning, Tom."

"I had that honour two days ago. He's superb."

She frowned impatiently.

"He's a tragedy, Tom."

"A very gay one!"

"Oh, don't be funny! Roy is the most ghastly anti-climax. You men don't half understand the woman's outlook upon life. I have been watching Mary Gaskell for a week. Do you think it amuses her to find that she has been living on dreams?"

"Cut me some bread, dear. Roy has come back a conceited cub, but, after all, many of us have to go through the collar and cuff phase. We don't take very comprehensive and sympathetic views at three-and-twenty."

"Oh, nonsense. Isn't it just a question of heart? Mary Gaskell has simply lived for that boy. I don't suppose any man ever realises what he—as a man—has meant to his mother. But to come back after two years, and to treat your mother as though she were just an amiable housekeeper! It makes me savage."

"That's the tragedy, Gwen. Women expect too much; men give too little."

"And hasn't she a right to expect something? It's pitiful. She tries to keep a bright face, but I know that she is horribly hurt and disappointed. Oh, the selfishness of young people!"

Tom Richardson smiled at her affectionately.

"It is because you don't happen to be

The Mother

"Fishy, Gwen, that you are rather hard on the boy. Give him his chance. I dare say he will improve."

"If wonder?"

"Well, run round and ask Mary to come with us. She may like the drive."

Gwen Richardson's distrust of Roy Gaskell's ultimate attitude towards his mother appeared likely to be justified as the weeks went by. Mary Gaskell had planned that Scottish trip for June; they were to go up through Edinburgh, and the pass of Killicrankie to Inverness, steam down the Caledonian Canal, visit the islands, wander back through the fens, and spend a week in the English lake country on the way home. But June had reached its zenith, and Roy Gaskell passed his time playing cricket and tennis, running up to town for weekends, and compromising himself with sedulous foolishness by following at the tail of a certain young woman's skirt.

Roy Gaskell thought that Gwen had changed, and changed for the worse. She treated him very casually when they met, and appeared to attach no importance to anything he said, and since he was full of opinions, and lavish in spreading them about, he had little use for a young woman who looked bored when he was putting the Empire in order.

He said much the same things about Gwen Richardson as she said of him to her brother.

"What's happened to Gwen, mater? Seems to me she has turned into a regular pig."

Mary Gaskell defended Gwen.

"I don't think that I should ever have called Gwen a prig, dear."

"That's how it strikes me. Gives herself the airs of a schoolmistress. She used to be a regular sport."

His mother did not argue the point. She had hoped that some day Roy would marry Gwen.

Wandering up one evening to the red villa on the hill Gwen found Mary Gaskell sitting out under the lime tree in her garden. She looked trist and a little forlorn, a lonely woman, the more lonely because her thoughts were not pleasant company.

"Roy has gone out, dear; he is dining with friends, and then going to the theatre."

"Roy always appears to be out."

"He is so popular, Gwen."

"I suppose so."

The girl had to smother her anger. She wanted to ask Mary Gaskell whether her son had ever taken her to the theatre, ever conspired to delight her with some little plan for a day's trip to London or into the country, but such questions could not be asked without humiliating Mary Gaskell's love.

Gwen approached the question of the Scottish holiday.

"When are you going to Scotland?"

Mary Gaskell answered her rather hurriedly.

"Oh, I have given it up. Roy wants to go to Germany for a month with a brother officer to improve his German."

"I see."

"And I can't afford both holidays. I should like Roy to go to Germany."

Gwen had to let her feelings find some way of escape.

"I think you are most wonderfully good to Roy."

"Do you, dear?"

The sensitive face flushed with pleasure.

"Yes—almost too good. He ought to go to Scotland with you."

"My dear, what is it to me—so long as he is happy. And I am pleased that he should be so keen on improving his German."

Gwen smothered a rush of cynicism. German indeed! It was very probable that Master Roy would find himself in Paris, or if he did invade Germany he would spend that month seeing life in Berlin.

She felt that she must speak to Roy, try to sting the young man out of his selfishness, and she asked Tom's advice.

Her brother looked grave. He happened to know more than Gwen did, and he had joined her in feeling for Mary Gaskell.

"I don't know that it would do any good, Gwen. He would be astonished. The youngster is too pleased with himself; you can't hurt very conceited people. Besides, he would tell you to mind your own business."

"I think it is my business."

"But Master Gaskell would not think so. The youngster has a lot to learn, and from what I hear he has got in with the wrong sort of people."

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"Oh, I know. I have seen him——"

"Young idiot!"

Roy Gaskell was not dining with friends that night, and was not at the theatre. Any tale was good enough for a mother like Mary Gaskell.

Master Roy was giving a little supper at the "Roma," an Italian restaurant on the sea front. His guests were the flamboyant young woman of the pink parasol, and a girl friend of hers, a "flapper" of fifteen.

They sent the "flapper" home after supper; she was dutiful, and knew how to serve her friends. The flamboyant young woman and Roy Gaskell went and watched the sea, leaning over the parade railings, with their elbows touching.

"Well, what's it to be? A picture show or a couple of deck-chairs, or a stroll along the front?"

Roy Gaskell thought himself very much the man of the world, but he was a fool of a boy in the hands of this young woman. Miss Bertha Durrant had studied ambiguities until she had been taught to assume an air of insouciant and self-protective frankness. She was clever with all the elemental feminine cleverness that had learnt how the male creature must be handled and deceived. Her physique was wholly provocative, if a little flabby. And she had had experience, and so much of it that she had come to desire finality and a permanent victim.

"I'm tired of pictures. Let's stay here."

"Just what you like. But, I say, Bertha——"

He tried to put an arm round her, but she shrugged it away.

"Don't do that—please."

"Oh, all right."

Roy Gaskell might be a conceited young fool, but so long as a woman knew how to appeal to him she could prevent him from acting like a cad. There was breed and good blood in the boy, and the woman at his side had a practical knowledge of men. Experience had taught her that the better the man, the less he is attracted by cheapness in a woman.

And so she had dressed herself up in a pretty prudery that succeeded in being all the more provoking. She aimed at seeming the super-lady, cleverly combining a frivolous audacity with a niceness that was always on its guard. Her modesty

was unimpeachable. She would let him take her out to supper, but she made him realise that she could be shocked.

"I say, Bertha, you're not huffy!"
She maintained an air of chastening chilliness.

"You seem to forget that I live in Sandbourne, and that I've got a reputation."

"Well, I'm not hurting it."

"Is that your fault? It's not nice of you, Roy. A man ought to be chivalrous, and all that."

She had an expressive voice, and she had grown amazingly fastidious in her choice of words. He reacted.

"I'm sorry. You know—I think you are just——"

But she interrupted him. He was still in the dangling stage, and the lure had to be made more elusive.

"Oh, yes—I know. Let's go and listen to the band. It is still playing."

"Just as you like."

So she made him sit beside her genteelly in a deck-chair under the glare of a big electric light, while she listened with every sign of critical appreciation to the band's rendering of Chaminade's "Autumn" and Bayne's fine waltz "Destiny."

"Yes, that's quite sweet. I wish they would play something by Grieg."

She hummed a melody. He was inclined to be a little fractious.

"Give me the 'Chocolate Soldier'."

"Just popular stuff!"

She was out to impress him. Culture was what she lacked; she knew that very well. Her worldly position was somewhat ambiguous; her mother was a "decayed gentlewoman"—offensive phrase—and let "apartments" in order to add to a very limited income. Even "bluff" may be pathetic, but Bertha Durrant's insincerity was feline and practical.

A man stopped in front of them.
"Hallo—Chick!"

Roy Gaskell noticed that the fellow did not trouble to take his hat off.

Bertha Durrant looked up at him defiantly.

"Is that you, Mr. Purvis?"

The man gave a dry laugh. Even at night he was betrayed by his clothes and by his manners, a vulgar young fellow who was none too sober.



"Gwen Richardson stopped abruptly and leant against the railing of the esplanade"

"Oh, you sly little devil!"

Bertha Durrant rose.

"I think I will be getting home, Roy."

Gaskell stood up, quite ready to quarrel with the young man in the plush hat.

They moved off along the parade, Bertha Durrant glancing back over her shoulder.

"How dared that bouncer come and speak to me?"

"Who is he?"

"I used to know him—but I found out that he was a cad. He's not a nice man, Roy, and he drinks like a fish; a fellow with a little money and nothing to do."

Gaskell's bristles were up.

"I believe the chap is following us."

"Don't take any notice of him. One ought to ignore such people."

The man in the plush hat kept about twenty yards behind them, but when they left the sea front and turned into a quiet residential street he quickened

his pace and drew up within half a dozen paces.

"Hallo, Chick—why so haughty—anyway?"

Bertha Durrant gave Roy Gaskell a quick side glance.

"Don't take any notice. The beast has been drinking."

"All right, but I should like to punch his head."

Mr. Purvis persisted in his pursuit, flinging offensive facetiosities at them with impartial insolence. Roy Gaskell caught a glimpse of Bertha Durrant's face as they passed under a street lamp; it looked pinched and white and furious. She was biting her lower lip.

"I say, Bertha—I can't stand this. I am going to give that beast a thrashing."

She caught his arm.

"Don't, dear. I don't want to be mixed up in a vulgar row."

"But—"

"He's beneath contempt."

Roy humoured her; he could appreciate her point of view.

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"All right. But if I catch the black-guard alone—in a quiet corner—I'll give him a lesson."

They reached the gate of Bertha Durrant's home, a tall, narrow-faced, grey villa. Steps led up from the gate to the front door. The front garden was full of scrubby euonymus and holly trees.

"Good night, Roy."

She glanced down the road, and saw Purvis waiting under a lamp.

"Don't answer that cad, Roy, if he speaks to you. Go straight home. Promise——"

But Gaskell would promise nothing.

"I can talk to him now that you are out of the way."

She gave him a suspicious and half-frightened look.

"He has been drinking. Don't let him make a scene. He is not worth troubling about. Good night."

He caught her suddenly and kissed her.

"I couldn't help it, Bertha."

She smiled at him.

"Well—I'll forgive you. You have been a dear. Leave that idiot alone. Promise!"

"Oh—all right!"

"Good night. See you to-morrow."

She ran up the steps, waved to him, and disappeared into the house.

Roy Gaskell walked back towards the figure under the gas lamp. The man was waiting for him; standing in the middle of the path.

"Hallo! So you've caught on—have you? I used to go up and down those steps before you came on the scene. I've kissed her—at the gate—just as you did, my lord."

Roy swung out into the road, his chin in the air, his nostrils quivering.

"You had better go home," he said, "or you'll get into trouble. Good night."

Purvis gave a thick laugh.

"Here—stop a moment. I'm not in the Army, thank God, but I'm as good a man as you are—and less of a fool. You stop and listen; I've got something to say."

Gaskell paused, and stood stiffly on the edge of the path. The light from the lamp fell on Purvis's face, big and white and puffy, and its expression was one of insolent hardihood.

"Don't think I'm upset because you've stepped into my shoes. She's no novelty.

You're the last of a whole blessed bill. Now I'll just tell you——"

Young Gaskell went white.

"Look here," he said, "I promised not to bother about you. Go home, and don't be a fool."

"Fool! Who's the fool?"

He began to blurt out scandalous things, and then Roy Gaskell knocked him down. The fellow was no coward, and he was strongly built. He got on his feet promptly, and in that deserted street those two young males fought it out in bitter earnest.

The soldier was something of a boxer; he had better blood in him, and he had not spent his time lounging about in hotel bars. After the first twenty seconds he had his man blown and beaten, and Purvis went to the ground.

Gaskell waited to see if the fellow meant to get up for a second bout, but Purvis sat with back to a garden wall, dazed and battered, dabbing at his nose with a crumpled handkerchief. His brand kept Roy from palavering with the cad. He pulled his collar straight, picked up his hat, and walked off in the direction of the sea.

Mary Gaskell was sitting up for Roy. The clock had struck eleven, and she was drowsing over a book when the closing of the front door roused her.

She had risen to go and meet him when he flung the drawing-room door open and walked in.

"Hallo, mater! I thought you had gone to bed."

"Roy!"

She looked at him in astonishment and alarm, for his collar was crumpled, his tie torn, his mouth swollen and bleeding, and he had a big bruise on his forehead.

"Roy—dear! What has happened to you?"

He was in a state of great excitement, that heroic excitement that makes youth so furiously irresponsible and so intolerant of opposition and restraint. He was twenty-three, and he was violently in love, and someone had blasphemed against the thing that had intoxicated him.

"It's all right, mater; I have been thrashing a cad, that's all."

"Roy, you've been fighting! My dear——"

The Mother

He was in the saddle, and he let himself go. "I have thrashed a blackguard who dared to insult a woman, the woman I mean to marry."

Mary Gaskell looked at him mutely. She went very white, and stood absolutely still like one caught by a sudden pain at the heart. All this was news to her, a bolt from the blue.

She groped for the arm of her chair; her knees were shaking. Then she sat down, still looking at Roy with mild, astonished eyes.

"You had never told me, dear."

Her voice was very soft and quiet. She was striving to calm herself, telling herself that she should have foreseen some such crisis. But her quietude irritated Roy; he was in a melodramatic mood; a tearing, blank verse temper that lusted to spout fire and to deal blows.

"Well, I meant to tell you. You'll like her, mater; of course you'll like her. She's a lady, but her mother's not well off. I hadn't said anything definite, but this had settled things. He dared to say that she was an adventuress. I thrashed him. And to-morrow I shall ask her to marry me."

Mary Gaskell looked at him helplessly. He was walking up and down, pushing the chairs out of his way, his eyes ablaze. This sexual explosion dazed her. It was all so new and strange and unexpected. She was discovering the crude and passionate male in the child that she had borne, and she did not know how to deal with the phenomenon. Her one inspiration, a woman's inspiration, spoke of self-sacrifice.

"Of course, dear—I will help you. Tell me everything. Do I know her—already?"

He stood on the hearthrug, and held forth.

"Her name's Bertha Durrant. Her mother is a doctor's widow. They are not well off, but what does that matter? She is the only woman I have ever cared for."

How many mothers have listened to such vapourings, and felt sick at heart perhaps, and mistrustful of the future? It is the ultimate fate of those who have had to give everything, hoping that the hand that they have cast upon the waters may return to them. A young man's

love is a merciless, selfish flame. All other loves are consumed by it like so much oil, and Roy Gaskell was an ordinary young man, rather more selfish and passionate than most youngsters of his age.

Mary Gaskell listened like one whose thoughts were elsewhere. She was thinking of the little chap playing in his nursery, or tearing up and down the garden path and puffing like an engine. Trivial memories flashed into her mind. She remembered him running to her with a cut knee, and complaining that the ground had hit him. And now he came to her as the young man, issuing ultimata, not asking to be comforted, not counting very much upon the importance of her sympathy.

"You must bring her to see me, Roy."

For the first time he looked at her with less assurance. The two women were such contrasts that even he was struck by the incongruity of the thing.

"Of course. You'll like her."

He thrust a sense of discomfort away from him.

"I should have told you earlier, mater, but I wasn't quite sure of myself."

His mother rose and kissed him.

"Your happiness is everything, dear. I hope she is worthy of you—that she will make you a good wife."

He became gauche and self-conscious.

"That's all right, mater. I think I'll go and have a wash, and then turn in. You shouldn't have sat up for me."

He went to bed, and, despite the fever of youth, he slept. Mary Gaskell spent an hour on her knees, praying. She did not sleep as Roy slept; she had to struggle with herself, to compel herself to accept surrender.

Some days later Gwen Richardson returned home in great wrath, and found her brother practising putting on the lawn at the back of the house.

"Tom, come in—will you?"

She stood at the French window of his study, a very intense young woman with determined eyes.

Her brother, with a characteristic crouch, holed a long putt, and smiled happily.

"What's the matter, old girl?"

"I want to speak to you."

"Oh, all right!"

He strolled in, and she closed the

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window. One had to be careful when one's strip of privacy lay sandwiched between other strips where maiden ladies sat out in garden chairs.

"Tom!"

"What's the matter?"

"Roy Gaskell has got engaged to that Durrant girl."

"What!"

Tom Richardson was a fairly stolid person, but his air of playful relaxation vanished instantly.

"Got engaged to the Durrant girl! Great Cæsar! But surely——"

Gwen threw herself into a chair. She had just passed through a fierce emotional experience.

"Yes; I've just come from there. She told me; she's heartbroken. It happened days ago. She had the girl to the house; she knew nothing; then was ready to make the best of it. But we women are quick, Tom, at reading other women. We are not easily deceived. She knew at once, guessed at once. It is not merely that the girl is vulgar. Mary saw her through and through. She tried to warn Roy, and he was furious——"

"Young fool!"

"They have had three miserable days. He is on stilts, with his dignity in the air, playing the man of honour. Mary broke down with me, told me everything, asked me what I knew of the girl."

"And you told her?"

She winced.

"Tom, I had to. It was only honest. I had heard it from you, about young Merriman. It was in confidence—of course. I am going to speak to Roy; he has been running up all sorts of debts, too. It's abominable!"

"Confound it, what messes these crude youngsters make of life! The girl's impossible; I happen to know. But look here, Gwen—I can't see you tackling Roy."

"I can——"

"Listen to me, the youngster's a powder mine. You'll get scorched. These affairs can be devilish nasty——"

He stood staring out of the window.

"No; it's better that you should keep out of it, Gwen. If it is anybody's business, it is a man's business. I might be able to do something."

"You always were a sort of hero with Roy, Tom."

"That's an ancient myth by now. I'll think it over. Poor Mary Gaskell must be pretty miserable."

"I know how unhappy she is. Only desperation would have made her confess to me about Roy. And she had hoped for so much, not selfishly; she counted on being his comrade, and he has treated her as though she were an old nurse."

Dr. Thomas Richardson had a country visit that afternoon, and as his car passed the upper end of Wilton Park, he saw a man and a girl leaning against a gate and looking towards the sea. It was but a momentary glimpse he had of them, yet he recognised Roy Gaskell and Bertha Durrant. Roy was staring sulkily at the horizon; the girl appeared to be voicing a grievance, and her profile was the profile of a woman in a temper.

"Why hasn't your mother been to see us? I suppose she's ashamed of us—because we have to let rooms and live in a back street. I hate snobs; I can't tell you they make me feel bitter."

Young Gaskell tried to pacify her. This aping of a sensitive pride was part of her campaign. She had caught her man, and she was testing the strength of her influence over him.

"Let things alone for a day or two, Bertha. You know what mothers are. I'm an only son."

"Oh, I know! But it has hurt me. I suppose I am just as fond of my mother as you are of yours. If you really cared——"

He betrayed a sudden impatience.

"Do you think I like it? It makes me angry; women are so unreasonable. I am doing my best. My mother is soft-hearted enough; she will come round in a few days."

She shrugged her shoulders, but she saw that she could strain the situation no further.

"All right, dear; I'll be patient. I'm rather impulsive and hot tempered, and you wouldn't like me to have no pride, would you?"

They drew closer together, and his arm went round her.

"Of course not, Chick-a-biddy. I'm proud of you. People always seem to kick up such a fuss over these affairs. I know I can bring the mater round."

But in this he boasted beyond his powers. Mary Gaskell, the quiet, sensible

The Mother

live, unselfish woman, displayed an obstinate strength that surprised her son. She said no bitter things; she was very gentle and very generous, but she utterly refused to recognise the situation as a *fait accompli*. It was as though her honour felt itself concerned. She refused to consent to see him sacrifice himself. He could not move her, and his failure made him peevish and brutal.

"The first time I ask for a really serious thing, you go against me and won't listen to reason. I suppose all mothers are selfish."

She did not flinch at the bitter taunt, but looked at him pathetically, smiling with infinite wisdom.

"No, dear; I am not being selfish. Once—when you were very tiny—you wanted to pull the coals out of the fire, and I had to drag you away. Was that selfishness?"

Her calmness exasperated him. She seemed to be so sure of herself.

"Oh, rot, mater! I'm not an infant—now. It's all prejudice on your part, because the girl has no money—"

"Roy! To think that you should accuse me of that!"

He flushed.

"Well, perhaps it isn't that. But you don't want another woman to have me. It can't help it; I'm a man. Do listen to reason."

She sighed.

"My dear, I shall not stand in the way when the real woman comes. I am trying to keep you for her, and you won't understand."

He gave it up; she was unanswerable in that she would take no answer; but he was savagely determined to go his own way.

As for that trip into Germany it had passed into the limbo of things fated never to be accomplished. There was no longer any inclination for it; moreover, funds were lacking. Mary Gaskell had had to pay some heavy bills for her son; her income was not elastic; the money that she had saved for that Scottish trip had been swallowed up.

And Miss Durrant was a luxury in herself. Roy had given her presents, bought her a fine diamond and sapphire ring, but his ready money had come to an end, and in the circumstances he could not beg more money from his

mother. The situation was exasperating to a rather profuse young man energetically in love. One could not carry one's fiancée about on credit, and one or two tradesmen had sent in bills with a polite intimation that a settlement would be desirable.

Roy Gaskell was driven to the idea of borrowing. He ran over the list of friends and acquaintances, and it was to Tom Richardson that he went. Gwen's brother had met him once or twice during the last week, and had gone out of his way to be friendly.

Roy Gaskell put his own construction on this same friendliness.

"Tom Richardson's a man of the world. He understands. Not like that prig of a sister of his. He always was a good sort."

Yet Roy Gaskell shirked meeting that prig of a sister, and he caught Tom Richardson as he was getting out of his car after an afternoon's round.

"Can I speak to you, Tom?"

"Rather. Come in and have some tea—"

"I don't know—"

"Gwen is out. Come along in, man."

Richardson—as a doctor—was an adept at handling people. He had magnetism, and he was very shrewd. He appeared to take complete control of Roy Gaskell without the youngster realising that he was being led. Tom was a good fellow, so confoundedly sensible, not a bit prejudiced. Roy lit a pipe. He felt himself back in a hearty, frank, male atmosphere. It seemed quite easy to ask Gwen's brother to lend him money.

And Tom Richardson seemed amazingly ready to lend it.

"That's all right, Roy! I'll send you four fivers round to-morrow. How will that do?"

"I say, it's awfully decent of you."

"Not a bit."

Tom Richardson had won the first move. He had to win the confidence of this restive and rebellious young male, and he won it so well that Roy Gaskell began to pour his version of the "great affair" into Richardson's ears.

"I expect you've heard about it."

Tom confessed that he had. He lured Roy on with an air of sympathy.

"I've been having a devil of a time, I can tell you. The mater has turned

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into a regular frost. It's a pleasure to be able to talk to a man—a man of the world. The girl might be an utter bad lot by the way some people have been behaving. I'm going to marry her; I'd marry her to spite them."

Tom did not show his true colours. He let Roy Gaskell fume and protest and explain. He even allowed him to carry away the impression that he—Tom Richardson—thoroughly approved of the attitude he had taken up. Tom believed in Russian strategy. His ultimate attack would be all the more deadly.

People who frequented the sea front at Sandbourne were familiar with the figure of a young man who was drawn up and down in a bath-chair. He was a consumptive, and a doomed man, and his pale eyes seemed to stare with a dull resignation at the life that drifted past him. The disease had refined him. His face looked the colour of ivory, and in his poor neck all the muscles and tendons showed.

Bertha Durrant always avoided the young man's bath-chair as though it carried the white death. She was afraid of him, and dared not meet those pale eyes. There were reasons.

Paul Merriman was Dr. Richardson's patient, and Tom Richardson had a full knowledge of how Merriman had passed his life. The nearness of death had changed the man, etherealised him, filled him with a new and more human sympathy.

Tom Richardson took Paul Merriman into his confidence. The sick man had not been blind. He had watched Roy Gaskell marching in chains, the captive of that flamboyant young woman, and Paul Merriman had pitied him.

Tom told him everything.

"It's the woman at home who is suffering. She sees the tragedy of it plainly, but the youngster is blindly obstinate. I want to get him away from that girl."

Paul Merriman was sitting at his window overlooking the trees of the park. There were flowers on the table beside him. His skin looked like wax.

"I might do something, Richardson."

"Could you?"

"I haven't long to live. What does it matter to me if I find myself sued in the courts. It would be a good piece of

work to end one's life with. I suppose the boy is touchy?"

"Like fire. Supposing I bring him to see you quite casually. I could manage it."

"Do. I'll feel my way."

Thus began Roy Gaskell's acquaintanceship with the man of the bath-chair. Richardson manœuvred him into Merriman's rooms, and they had tea together. This scheme of his soon betrayed significant developments.

Roy and Miss Durrant were walking along the sea front when Paul Merriman's chair came along, drawn by an ancient man with a long white beard. It was like Father Time drawing Death. Bertha Durrant suddenly discovered that she wanted to look at the shops across the road.

"Wait a moment—there's Merriman. I want to speak to the poor beggar. Come and be introduced."

The startled look in her eyes surprised him.

"You know him?"

"Yes. Come along."

But she turned aside.

"I can't. That man makes me shiver. He's like a corpse going about—it's horrible."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense. Do come away. I want to look at those new French hats over there."

Roy surrendered to her, but he was puzzled. Bertha Durrant was not usually so sensitive, so capable of being affected by subtle impressions.

Then matters moved with dramatic suddenness. Paul Merriman had a severe hæmorrhage; it brought death much nearer; he could not go out to watch the sea, the holiday folk, and the children at play.

One morning Roy Gaskell had a note from him:

"DEAR GASKELL,

"Will you come and see me? I should like to have a chat with you. I have been very bad. Richardson has given me up. Humour a sick man. Yours sincerely,

"PAUL MERRIMAN"

Roy went. He found Merriman lying in a reclining chair by the open window.

The Mother

He looked as bloodless as a piece of marble, but his eyes were bright.

"It is good of you to come, Gaskell. I have got something to say to you."

Roy looked at him in surprise.

"Oh?"

"I'm a dying man, you know, and I have got something on my mind. I had been watching you for some weeks before Richardson brought us together. Sit down. It's serious."

Roy sat down, wondering what was coming.

"I don't suppose I shall live another month. You must take what I am going to say as the true and solemn confession of a dying man. I am going to tell you the truth—because I think you ought to know it. Don't get angry with me. It's too serious for that."

Roy Gaskell sat there and listened. At first his face hardened; a queer, threatening light came into his eyes. He did not utter a word. And then the voice of the doomed man seemed to magnetise him. He listened, motionless, bleak faced, standing straight before him at the trees in the park.

Merriman finished speaking. His eyes lost their brightness; he looked exhausted, as though he had nerved himself for an effort and was ready to fall in a languor of fatalism now that the thing was done.

"That's the truth, Gaskell. I wanted you to know. You are young, and you have your life to live. It is not a pleasant thing to have to tell a man, but there you are—I have done it."

Roy Gaskell had nothing to say. He did not ask Paul Merriman any questions. There seemed no questions to ask. He was dazed, sobered, yet horribly conscious of the fact that this dying man had stretched out a cold hand, and turned his romance into a mockery and a madness.

He got up.

"I didn't know all this. It's rather a sudden smash up. Of course, I know you must be telling the truth."

Merriman smiled at him faintly.

"I dare say you hate me, Gaskell, at this moment. But some day—if you take the warning I have given you, you will bless me."

"Oh, I suppose so. I want to think things out. I'll come and see you again to-morrow."

He escaped, sullen, feverish and angry. The thing that Merriman had told him had filled him with passionate nausea and disgust. For a while he tried not to believe it, but somehow that dying man's voice haunted him and carried conviction. What a mockery! And all this explained that inexplicable dread of hers, her fear of the White Death in the wheeled chair. A passionate reaction seized him. He began to realise that he had been fooled, and his self-love rose in wrath.

He walked miles, aimlessly, in a rage of restlessness. Then an idea dawned on him. Tom Richardson was responsible for this. Tom knew what Merriman knew. He set off in the direction of Richardson's house.

The doctor was in. He saw by Roy Gaskell's face that something had happened.

"Hallo! Stay and have some tea with me."

Roy plunged straight into confidences, yet with an air of accusation.

"I have been to see Merriman. He wrote and asked me to go and see him. He has been telling me the most damnable things—about her."

"Sit down, old chap—"

"I can't sit down. It's absurd. But look here, Richardson, did you know?"

"Know what?"

"About this—about her?"

Tom nodded.

"Oh yes; I knew."

"Good heavens, and you never told me!"

He was walking up and down like a leopard in a cage. Richardson went and put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him into a chair.

"Sit down there. We have got to thrash this out together like men. Keep cool and face the artillery."

His imperturbable kindness dominated Roy.

"My dear boy, I happened to know all this—but, frankly, you were in no temper to listen to reason. You would have told me to mind my own business. So I thought of bringing you into touch with Merriman, the actual man who knew and who had suffered. He was eager to warn you—whatever might come of it. He has warned you, and he has told you the truth."

Roy sat and stared at the carpet. The

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beginnings of a great humiliation were upon him.

"I suppose you think me an almighty fool."

"Nonsense! Am I a model of rectitude and wisdom? I nearly landed myself in the same sort of mess when I was a student."

"I can't marry her."

"Marry her! You would be committing suicide."

"What am I to do?"

"Why, break it off."

"How?"

"Write and tell her that something has happened to make you change your mind."

"Yes, and a nice row there will be!"

Richardson stood in front of him and spoke with emphasis:

"No, there will be nothing of the kind. The girl is no fool, Roy; she will guess what has happened. One word from Merriman would silence her. She dare not make a stir against you; she knows quite well that any spite she might show would come back on her, and rightly so. Don't worry about that. Even if there were some sort of a scandal, it would be worth while facing it to get free."

Gaskell looked sullen and depressed.

"But I shall be meeting her!"

"Good heavens, man, you would face a line of bayonets, and you are afraid of a woman who has tried to make a fool of you! Well, perhaps it would not be a bad idea for you to clear out of Sandbourne for a while. Look here, Roy. I am off to Switzerland in three days for my holiday. Come with me. Why not?"

Gaskell's eyes met his with a flash of gratitude and relief.

"I say, it's awfully good of you, Tom, but I haven't any money."

"That can be arranged."

"I am not going to ask the mater for money."

He betrayed a sudden strange bitterness against his mother.

"The mater was right. She'll smile, and be sweet and sorry for me. I won't stand it, and I won't take money from her."

Richardson looked at him gravely.

"If you feel like that, Roy, for heaven's sake keep it to yourself. I

don't think you appreciate your mother. She is the best woman I ever met."

"She's too good."

"Don't say things that you will be sorry for—savagely sorry for—some day, I'll produce the money; I'm a flourishing person. You can repay me when you like. We start on Friday. That's settled."

Roy nodded.

"What about writing to her?"

He wanted to get it over.

"Sit down at my desk and write at once. I'll see that it is posted. Then you can draw a deep breath."

An hour later Roy Gaskell found himself within view of the little red brick villa that he used as an hotel. He felt a very lively disinclination to meet his mother. His pride and his self-love were sore, and he found it difficult to forgive her for having been in the right. It was the egoist's attitude; he was disgusted with life, and tempted to tumble into a futile cynicism. After all, why should he tell her anything? She would discover the truth in due season. He was not going to apologise, to confess that he had been made a fool of.

He found her in the front garden snipping off dead roses. There was no chance of slipping in casually, and so avoiding a formal return. For Roy Gaskell was in an overstrung mood; he imagined that his mother expected a crisis, and was on the watch, and he was not in a temper to be stared at questioningly.

"Have you had tea, dear?"

"Yes—thanks."

He strolled straight up the path to the front door with an air of detachment that concealed nothing.

"I have a few letters to write."

He went in, closing the door after him, leaving his mother standing at gaze. If he had expected to deceive her, he was a very great fool. That sensitive love of hers made her wondrous intuitive.

At dinner that night Roy was sulky and self-absorbed, but he managed to tell his mother that he was going abroad with Tom Richardson. He made the announcement quite casually, as though it were a custom of his to fly off across Europe at three days' notice like any cosmopolite with unlimited cash.

The Mother

Her mother did not betray any surprise. She knew a great deal more than Roy imagined.

"I'm so glad. Where do you and Tom think of going?"

"Oh—Switzerland."
"That's splendid. Tom knows Switzerland very well; he will be just the man to travel with."

After dinner Roy retreated to his den, but Mary Gaskell sat down at her desk, unlocked a drawer, and took out her pass-book. Her balance at the bank was not what it should have been; she made a few calculations, smiled, and taking her cheque-book, wrote out a cheque.

She blotted it carefully, looked at it with a half humorous tenderness, and then went upstairs. She knocked at Roy's door.

"May I come in, dear?"

"Yes."

He was sitting smoking in the club when she had bought him, but he did not get up.

"What is it, mater?"

"Just a little something, Roy, that may be useful, a help towards Switzerland."

She held out the cheque. He flushed redly, angrily, but did not stretch out a hand.

"No—thanks, mater—I can't take it."

"But—my dear—I want you to take it."

"I tell you I won't. It's good of you; I can manage all right."

She winced, and stood there doubtfully, still holding the piece of paper towards him.

"Take it to please me, Roy."

"Mater, I tell you I can't. It's a question of pride. I have taken enough of your money."

She gave him a reproachful look, and turned towards the door.

"I'm sorry, dear. What is mine—is yours, you know. I did not think that such a thing as pride would ever come between us."

She loitered, but he had nothing to say. He was relighting his pipe. The peace offering had been refused. Mary Gaskell was grievously hurt.

She left him, but she did not destroy that cheque. She locked it away as a sort of memento, a pathetic thing to be treasured. Roy was in a rage.

"Prize-money for being a good boy, I suppose! I wonder if she knows? I shall be glad to get away from women."

And he pitied himself, so hard as yet was the shell of his young egoism. Humiliation was to bite deep into him, but he did not foresee the future, when he would lie wounded and broken, at the mercy of his mother's hands.

In three days he was off to Dover with Tom Richardson, and those three days had seen him in a mood of isolation and reserve. Such reserve, full of an imagined, Byronic dignity! His mother knew what had happened; she was waiting for him to speak, but that confession was never made. She did not force it, did not importune him with a woman's affection. She was wise in her restraint, though how deeply his silence hurt her Roy Gaskell never knew.

He kissed her perfunctorily, even with a suggestion of self compulsion.

"Good-bye, mater."

"Good-bye, dear. Enjoy yourself, and send me a card."

"Yes."

He escaped, still the young man on his dignity, unlicked by experience.

* * * * *

Richardson and Roy Gaskell were still in Switzerland when War spread like a huge thunderstorm over Europe. It came—sinister and undreamt of, filling the blue of the summer sky, sending a shock of dread and amazement through the hearts of those who had come to look upon war as a mischance to be ignored.

Who will ever forget that amazing week, that madman's week, when the soul of a great people pledged itself to infamy and dishonour? England, with its thoughts turned towards sea beaches and summer fields, thrilled with a strange awe, a listening solemnity. Her eyes gazed of a sudden upon the face of Destiny. Those were epic days.

War! Mary Gaskell could hardly credit it. The whole thing seemed like a sudden madness that must pass, a titanic jest, a mere pageant of words writ large on the posters. Surely it was impossible that war could come! She was thinking of Roy out yonder in Switzerland. She was afraid, greatly afraid, and yet she could not convince herself that the tragedy was real.

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Each morning she opened the paper with trembling hands. The shock came to her at last. England had taken up the gage; there was to be war, war for the sake of a nation's honour.

Mary Gaskell was still staring at those printed lines that kept blurring themselves before her eyes when Gwen Richardson burst in on her. She had not stood upon formalities; one forgot to ring front-door bells on such occasions.

She gave one glance at Mary Gaskell's pale face. Roy's mother looked ten years older.

"Have you heard?"

Mary Gaskell showed her the paper.

"Yes—I know. I mean from Roy?"

"No."

"I have had a card from Tom. They have started home. People are rushing back in crowds; it seems to be a frightful scramble; one cannot get into the trains. But they will be back in a day or two."

She sat down by the open window, vividly aware of what must be passing through Mary Gaskell's mind. To many such women Fate had brought a black hour of anguish, doubt, suspense. She was not one of those whose thoughts flew to her money in the bank. The call was on her own flesh and blood, on the very life for which she lived.

She folded up the paper and laid it aside on the table.

"Somehow—dear—I never realised that this would happen. Of course—his regiment is in India; he may not be called upon, but I am trying not to be selfish. He is a soldier. I made him a soldier—as his father had wished. The best lies with God."

Gwen went across and kissed her.

"You dear—How brave you are!"

"No, I am not brave; I am a woman. We women, dear, are still so much at the mercy of men. They make war and we have to give them our sons; they rush away like boys, cheering, and we have to smother our tears and pretend that it is glorious. It isn't, dear; it's horrible. Ask all mothers. But we have to live up to our men, as things are at present. I shall not let Roy think me a coward."

Gwen had nothing to say, so she kissed her, and let her emotion vent itself against the Germans.

"Those treacherous beasts! They have

broken a solemn promise. No sense of honour! They will have to pay."

Two days passed, and late one afternoon Gwen Richardson received a telegram. It came from Dover, and had been sent by Tom:

"Just landed. R. persists in going straight to Aldershot. Sent Mary. Go and see her.—RICHARDSON."

Gwen put on her hat and went. She was furious with Roy. As if that impatient patriotism of his could not have spared his mother a few hours!

Mary Gaskell had had her telegram. She showed it to Gwen with a struggling smile. It was laconic, and sounded heartless in its haste:

"Going straight to Aldershot. Home battalion there. May get taken on.—GASKELL."

Mary Gaskell still had that thin smile on her face when Gwen looked at her.

"Isn't he brave? So keen!"

Gwen had to smother a lump in her throat.

"Oh, brave enough! That's not so difficult. But I think he might have come here first."

But Mary Gaskell stood by her boy.

"No; I am glad he has acted like that. I'm proud of it. If I have to give I will give generously."

She waited two more days in a silent horror of suspense. Then Roy's letter came:

"DEAR MATER,

"I have had a piece of luck. One of the fellows attached to the home battalion is laid up. They have given me his place. I shall be back for one night—next Tuesday. Tremendously busy. Can't tell you much; in fact, we hardly know anything. Shall you be able to let me have a little money? I will pay it back later. Please send my service things on at once."

"We are going to give those Germans something.—Yours affectionately,

"Roy."

Mary Gaskell wrote to him by return. That letter of his she put away in a little private drawer in her desk. It held



"He dropped the wounded man and put his hands up over his face"

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all manner of memories, that drawer it would hold all the past if Fate took her son away from her.

Roy sent her no message as to when she might expect him on the Tuesday. She could hardly sleep all Monday night, being haunted by the idea that he might not be able to get leave. She rose early, and pottered about in the garden all the morning, compelling herself to do things that seemed trivial, and even ridiculous. Why should one trouble about weeds when men were going out to be killed? Did it matter to her seriously whether her roses gave her a few flowers late in the autumn? Who cared?

She grew very restless as the day passed. She knew the time-table by heart, the exact minute at which the trains arrived. She had decided not to go to the station.

Tea-time came. The 3.45 had been in more than half an hour. She had tea all alone, sitting in the bay window of the drawing-room so that she could watch the gate. She began to be very depressed, full of forebodings, conscious of a yearning that dreaded lest it should be cheated.

Then a taxi stopped outside the gate. She jumped up, her heart beating so that it gave her pain. He had come.

She ran out to meet him. He kissed her with a kind of youthful condescension, magnanimously, yet with the air of being absorbed in other matters. It was obvious that he took the war and himself with great pomp and ceremony. In fact, he was in fine spirits, like a self-important boy off on an adventurous holiday.

"Only just managed to get leave. We are off soon. I like the Colonel; he's smart, and very decent. Yes, I should say it would last three months."

Once more she was to be disappointed. She had hoped that this crisis would give her back the child of her own heart, that they would spend those few solemn hours together talking like dear friends. She had hoped that he would confess to her; tell her about that broken engagement. But she found him reserved, absorbed in the war business, unable to talk of anything but the Germans and what the English infantry would do to them. She saw that he did not realise that she was suffering, that it was not

a great game to her, but a tragedy and a horror.

"I say, mater, can you get hold of some sovereigns? We have got to take English gold with us."

She promised to go to the bank directly it opened next morning.

"I am sure they will let me have gold—for you."

"Oh, we'll commandeer it. We soldiers are the big dogs now."

No doubt it was difficult for a young man who was going to the front to sit still and talk to an elderly woman, even though that woman happened to be his mother. Roy appeared to find it so, for he rushed off after dinner to get an evening paper and to have a talk with Tom Richardson.

"I shan't be long, mater."

But he did not return till half-past ten, nor did it occur to him that his mother might have been justified in feeling hurt. Mary Gaskell had learnt much in the last three months; and it was to her credit that this knowledge had not embittered her.

Roy talked to her for half an hour. Then he began to yawn with the healthy helplessness of the young male.

"I think I'll be turning in. I was up at five."

He slept like a child, but Mary Gaskell lay awake all night.

Those last few hours seemed to race, and she clung to them with a feeling of anguish and despair. Roy had to leave by the twelve o'clock train. He went with her to the bank, where they managed to give her gold. Then they strolled into the park, for Roy had no desire for the sea front and the chance of a meeting with Bertha Durrant. For the first time he seemed to realise that he was leaving his mother, that she might be worried about it, that she might be wondering whether she would ever see him again.

A sudden awkwardness possessed him. He was overtaken by self-consciousness. He glanced at his mother's face, and some far-away, childish memory seemed to stir in him. Supposing he should never see her again. His buoyant egotism crumbled perceptibly.

"I'll send you a line when I come, mater. You must not worry. I shall come through all right."

The Mother

Her lips quivered. There was a tremor in his voice.

"I shall pray for you, dear."

And suddenly some outer husk seemed to fall away. He discovered that there were all sorts of things he wanted to say to her, but for the life of him he could not say them. He was inarticulate. For months he had treated his mother as a stranger, and all that habit of reserve clogged his emotions and stifled his desire for self-expression.

"You have been awfully good to me, mater."

Then he made the discovery that tears had rushed to her eyes. He was non-plussed, surprised, rendered more awkward and self-conscious. He glanced at his watch.

"We ought to be turning back."

"Yes, dear."

"You will come to the station with me?"

"Yes, I will come."

An hour later Roy found himself sitting beside her in a taxi. She was very pale, but her eyes were dry. A sudden sense of loneliness and of vague dread seized him. He could not find words to express himself, but he put out a hand half shyly and held one of hers.

She shuddered with emotion, but managed to keep calm.

"I know you will be very brave, dear. I shall be thinking of you every hour of the day."

A lump rose in his throat.

"I shall come back all right, mater. I'm not worrying about that."

She was very calm at the station, very quiet, but her eyes betrayed her. They watched him with a hungry and protective look. For a moment her slight, sensitive face expressed a primitive, female fierceness; he was being taken away from her, and her instincts rose in revolt.

She pressed her hands together, trying to smile, make herself talk of trivial things.

"If you should want more money, dear, do let me know. Be sure and take some good thick socks with you. Wouldn't some meat tabloids be useful?"

"They might. Hallo, here's the train."

He hailed it with relief, for his mother's eyes were beginning to unnerve him.

"Good-bye, mater. Don't wait; it makes it harder."

His arms went round her, and she clung to him for a moment.

"Oh, my dear. God bless you. You'll come back to me—I know."

She choked, and fought back her tears.

"I think I'll go. I won't wait, dear. Good-bye."

She kissed him, and his boy's mouth kissed her in return with sudden passion.

Then he pushed her gently away.

"Please go, mater. Yes, I'll write—whenever I can."

Her white face seemed to drift away from him, becoming a blur of yearning and of pain. He watched her walk quickly down the platform; at the main entrance she turned and waved.

He waved back. The next moment she had disappeared, and of a sudden he felt most horribly lonely.

Doors were slamming. He climbed into an empty carriage, sat down heavily in a corner seat, and stared hard at one of the coloured photographs above the seat opposite him.

"Oh—damn!"

He was conscious of a fierce desire to jump out of the carriage and run after that slight and lonely little figure that had vanished behind the brick walls of Sandbourne station. Then a fat man blundered in, breathing hard, and dragging a bag, which bumped against Roy Gaskell's knees. Why could not that fat fool have tumbled in elsewhere and left him alone!

* * * * *

For Mary Gaskell life became a solemn ante-chamber to the shrine of Fate—a chamber where she sat in silence, waiting, praying, a suppliant before the feet of Fate's priestess Suspense. She was but one woman among thousands, women who had given sons, husbands and fathers, but no woman in the kingdom had ventured a greater love than hers.

The nights were full of a horror of wakefulness. Then she would fall asleep, and open her eyes to see the summer

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sun shining. For a moment she was her normal self; then the truth forced itself upon her consciousness, and she would lie there trying to realise that England was at war. It seemed incredible, a monstrous and even preposterous nightmare. She began to hate Germany with a bitter and instinctive hatred.

The days drew on. She received two post cards from Roy. He was well and in fine spirits. The cards came from France, but he could give her no names. They were like messages from another world, a world of silence and mystery. They made her feel that she could not reach him, that he had been snatched away from her, that she was helpless, no longer a mother.

As for the daily papers, she both dreaded them and hated them for their reticence. It was so difficult to be patient when one was risking so much. The silence was like the oppressive stillness before the breaking of a storm. She began to wonder how much longer she would have to bear it.

Gwen Richardson spent hours with her every day, and Tom would call for her in the afternoons and take her with him in his car.

Gwen was splendid. She brought wool and patterns, and persuaded those patient hands to be busy about something. She kept up a quiet cheerfulness; her sympathy had a healthy reticence; she could be silent, and yet express herself eloquently by very means of this same silence.

She pretended to be proud of Roy, and her pride would bring a flash of pleasure to Mary Gaskell's eyes.

"Tom says he was splendid. His one idea was to rush back and take his place in the fighting-line. It makes one exult to think how brave our men are."

Gwen tried to persuade herself that Roy would come back, but her sincerity hampered her when she tried to assure Mary Gaskell that her son would return to her. Who could be sure, who could speak confidently when Death stood there with veiled face?

* * * * *

Over in France Roy Gaskell had recovered all the exuberance of youth. He was a little over-excited, perhaps, a little too talkative; but he was out on a

great adventure, and France had opened her arms to the men in khaki. He walked about the streets of Boulogne, dined at one of the hotels with the other youngsters of his regiment, and felt gloriously exhilarated and ready for spectacular heroism. None of these youngsters had ever seen a man die, or marched till their feet were bloody and their brains clogged with sleep.

The pale face of his mother grew less vivid and less real. The pathos of that parting with her was overlaid and hidden by multitudinous happenings that obscured more subtle memories. This was a man's game, enthralling, full of stirring realities. That little villa at Sandbourne was not absolutely forgotten, but it was like a boy's book put away in a corner of a bookshelf and ignored.

Then came Mons, and the chaotic heroism of that great retreat. Roy Gaskell escaped untouched in body, but not untouched in soul. He had seen men shot; he had seen men and horses mangled horribly; he had had the fear of death in him; he had marched till his feet were blood-glued to his boots. It was not demoralisation, but a stupor of weariness and disgust that weighed on many a man during that savage retreat towards Paris.

At length a night came when the word went round that the rear guards were not being pressed, that the men might sleep. Roy found himself in a rough outhouse with three other officers. Two of them were already asleep on some straw. The third, a captain, with a bristling chin, and a gaunt, set face, was scribbling a letter, using a sheet torn from a pocket-book.

A candle-end was burning on the top of a tin. Roy Gaskell sat and stared at it with dull, expressionless eyes. He was unshaven; his face was a greyish brown, strangely old, and shrunken. And as he stared at the candle-flame he munched a stick of chocolate, his jaws moving mechanically as though he found no pleasure in eating.

Captain Blount glanced at him, and his eyes grew intent. He watched Roy Gaskell in silence for some seconds, and Roy Gaskell seemed utterly unaware of the fact that he was being watched.

"Hallo! Feel done?"

The Mother

Roy started. A vague smile spread over his face.

"Lie down, and get some sleep."

"Can't sleep."

Blount looked at him keenly.

"Something on your brain? You looked as though you had been reading Bergson, and were trying to think it out."

"I wasn't thinking. I was just feeling things—and yet not feeling them. Like being given gas, and coming round while the chap's still at work on your tooth."

Blount got up.

"Look here, Gaskell, go and lie down on that straw. Superior orders. Sleep, man, sleep. No nonsense."

Roy did not move. He was on the edge of a nervous collapse, and Blount guessed it.

"Oh—very well then."

He was a phenomenally strong man, and he picked Roy up, carried him over to a pile of straw in a corner, and laid him down there like a baby. Roy did not resist. Exhaustion and nerve strain had brought him to a state bordering on catalepsy. He was just clay, ready to be shaped by a stronger will.

Captain Blount blew out the candle, and groped his way back to the straw where Roy was lying. He stretched himself beside the younger man, and, reaching out, fixed a grip on Roy's arm.

"You have done very well, boy; I don't want you to crock up. Sleep. You'll feel fit again in the morning."

He maintained his grip on Roy's arm, and some soothing, strengthening stimulus seemed to flow from him into Gaskell's exhausted body. His breathing grew deep and regular, and presently he fell asleep.

Mary Gaskell's son passed through all the psychological experiences of war. In three days Blount was dead, shot through the heart in the moment of victory. For victory had come at last; the faces of the English were turned no longer towards the west; the whole army was transformed; the spirit of dogged and savage struggling against odds had given place to the smiling devilry of the attack.

Roy himself was changed. Blount's death had hit him hard for the moment, but no gloom could withstand the exultation of an advance. It was a glorious game of thrusting grimly at an enemy in

full retreat. Men shook off their weariness as if by magic. Chafed feet were forgotten. Prisoners and trophies were coming in.

There was yet another phase to be passed through, the most significant and subtle of them all.

It was the Battle of the Aisne. Both armies had dug themselves in. Attack and counter-attack oscillated to and fro with murderous persistency. The shell fire was indescribable. Not a man could be spared; not a man could rest. Each trench was like a steel wire under strain, taut, vibrating somewhat when the pressure waxed.

Dawn was about to break. Roy Gaskell stood leaning against the front wall of a trench, peering through a rough embrasure made of sods and the boughs of trees. The figures of men dwindled away on either side of him into the gloom, figures that squatted like Indians, or rested, half prone, with heads down on their arms. Not a word was spoken. The stillness was extraordinary. That trench might have been full of dead men waiting to be buried.

Roy Gaskell looked out over the dim landscape in front of him. It was grey and vague, and brooded over by an indefinable melancholy. Far away on the left a long wood trailed a blacker outline down into a valley. Yonder, straight ahead, in the far distance, something was burning. Shreds of white mist hung haphazard close to the ground. The field in front of the trench was dotted with cabbages.

Roy felt chilled. A shiver of awe went through him. A sudden inexplicable sadness seemed to drift out of that grey land. His brain felt extraordinarily clear and quick. A new sensitiveness was born in him, and he found his thoughts straying into a world of widening emotions.

What a contrast was all this to the life of a couple of months ago—that idle, sporting, careless life where a young man's chief need is to have money in his pocket! He thought of that affair with Bertha Durrant, and of his attitude towards his mother.

And suddenly he saw himself as he had never seen himself before. The grey light of that deathly dawn was part of a piece of grim enchantment. His other

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self stood out before him, the self of two months ago.

Heavens, what a beast he had been to his mother! He understood it all now. A hundred trivial incidents rushed back to haunt him—little things that he had passed over and failed to understand. It was as though Fate had been storing these memories against the day of his awakening when his manhood should discover itself and turn in disgust from the self-conceit of the crude boy.

What had he given his mother in return for all that she had given him? Nothing. He could hardly remember a single day when he had denied himself something on her account. He had made use of her, even felt aggrieved because she had not three thousand a year and an estate in the country.

For Roy Gaskell it was a moment of bitter self-knowledge, humiliation, and regret. Supposing he never went back to her, what sort of picture of himself had he left in her mind? She had forgiven him, no doubt, but he could not forgive himself as he stood facing the grey light of that September dawn.

From over yonder came the crack of a rifle, splitting the heavy silence with emphatic suddenness. Roy Gaskell's figure straightened. The whole trench stirred restlessly. Men peered out towards the dawn.

A sharp burst of firing came like a gust of wind before a storm. Then the grey distance quivered and roared with the abrupt thunder of guns. In an instant the whole temper of the dawn had changed. The stillness had gone from the grey landscape. Hell was let loose.

Shells came screaming overhead; the guns had not found the exact range. But every man in the trench knew what was to be expected. The Germans were making an attack in force, and their guns were covering the attack.

The rifle-fire over yonder crashed to a crescendo, and there was a sound of hoarse cheering. Roy Gaskell pulled his revolver from its holster, and stood peering through the embrasure. The clicking of rifle-bolts sounded along the trench; the men were very silent, staring out into the grey of the dawn.

The shells burst nearer. Then a crowd of scattered figures appeared racing back towards the cabbage field.

The outposts were falling back to join the main body.

A figure that lagged behind tottered and fell. It rose again, struggled on a little way, and then crumpled up like a figure of straw struck with a pole. Roy Gaskell never remembered willing himself to do the thing he did, but he had scrambled out of the trench and was dashing across the field to where the wounded man lay.

He reached him in safety, got his hands under the man's armpits, and started to drag him back towards the trench. He was within ten yards of it when he heard his men shouting:

"Look out, sir! Look out!"

Roy had not noticed the screaming of that shell; he had been absorbed in dragging the wounded man back to cover. Nor had he time to realise his danger and to throw himself down before the shell burst.

Something struck him. He dropped the wounded man and put his hands up over his face. He was conscious of a kind of crushing pain forcing its way into his brain. His hands were all wet. He felt himself falling.

Two men scrambled out of the trench and carried him to cover. They laid him at the bottom of the trench, and their faces looked sharp and fierce.

"My Gawd, Bill, 'e's got it. Damn those Germans!"

* * * * *

Mary Gaskell found that letter waiting for her on the breakfast-table, the envelope bearing a French stamp, the address written in a hand that was strange to her. She sat for several seconds staring at the letter without stretching out a hand to touch it.

Then she picked it up, and slit open the envelope with the desperate haste of one eager to put an end to moments of unbearable suspense. Her hands trembled so violently that she could hardly read what was written:

"DEAR MADAM,—It is with great regret that I write to inform you that your son has been dangerously wounded. He has been the victim of his own gallantry, for he received his wound through leaving the shelter of a trench to go to the help of a wounded man."

The Mother

"I have been sent to a base hospital, and I most sincerely hope that he will recover."
"Please accept my expression of deep sympathy.—Believe me, madam, yours sincerely,"

"HALLAM,
"Officer commanding Royal Wessex Regiment."

Mary Gaskell closed her eyes. The letter and the hands that held it sank into her lap. Her lips moved. She was praying.

* * * * *
Many days passed, days of helpless suspense, before further news reached Roy Gaskell's mother. It came through Tom Richardson, who had been worrying the War Office in person in an obstinate attempt to find out something definite. He returned from town by an evening train, looking grave and absorbed. He brought the news that Roy was alive, that he was expected, with a batch of wounded, at Folkestone, the very next day.

He sent Gwen to Mary Gaskell, advising her that the mother was not told the whole truth. Roy was alive, but he was nearly blind.

Gwen Richardson never forgot the look on Mary Gaskell's face when she heard that not only was Roy alive but that he was coming home.

"Oh, my dear, I can hardly believe it. Will Tom find out where he had been wounded?"

"Yes."

Mary Gaskell waited, her eyes watching Gwen's face.

"He was wounded in the head, very severely."

Mary Gaskell remained silent for several seconds.

"Is he disabled, dear?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"Then he won't be able to go back to the front?"

"No."

Mary Gaskell's pale face flushed.

"Oh, what a selfish coward I am! I can't help feeling glad, dear—exultant. The war can't take him away from me again. And, after all, I sent him without a murmur."

Gwen was suffering poignant distress. She felt that the mother ought to know

that Roy's sight was ruined, in spite of Tom's warning that she should be allowed to discover it for herself. Yet Gwen had great faith in Tom's human wisdom. It was possible that he counted upon the mother's pity carrying her above the shock and giving her a strength that would save her from disastrous grieving.

"Tom is going to meet Roy at Folkestone. He will bring him home."

"Perhaps it is better that a doctor should go: Tom has been so kind."

It was growing dusk next day when Tom Richardson walked out of Sandbourne station, holding Roy Gaskell's arm. He had to guide him down the steps and across the pavement to his car. A big shade covered Roy's eyes. He was less disfigured than Richardson had feared.

"Step up. That's it. Mrs. Gaskell's, Wilson."

The car moved off through the dusk, the sad twilight of an October evening. Roy sat absolutely still, his hands clasped, his head bowed forward. He had spoken hardly a dozen words on the journey from Folkestone. He seemed possessed by a tragic apathy; he just sat there mutely, crushed, in a daze.

Richardson left him in peace. He felt inarticulate. This was a woman's affair, and a woman's touch was needed.

The car stopped outside the gate of the villa. Tom helped Roy out and across the path. Then he saw someone hurrying through the front garden, and being wise in his generation, he left Roy to his mother and fled.

Mary Gaskell pulled the gate open and caught her son's hands.

"Oh, my dear—you have come back! Thank God! And you have been so brave!"

The dusk had softened the scars on his face, but that shade was significant.

"Your poor eyes are weak! I'll lead you in."

Roy said never a word. He was like a man who did not grasp things, did not understand. He did not tell her that he was nearly blind. That tragic apathy seemed to weigh him down and to keep him crushed and voiceless.

He let her lead him up the path, but at the first step he stumbled.

"My dear! It is rather dark, and you

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can't see well with that shade. Two steps; you remember."

She led him in, and he felt her hands trembling with emotion.

"This way—into the drawing-room. I haven't had the lamps lit yet; I didn't expect you quite so soon. There's the sofa; sit down. I will go and get some matches."

He blundered against the sofa, and sat down heavily. Mary Gaskell had reached the hall when she heard a sound that brought her to a standstill.

It was the sound of weeping, the passionate, agonised weeping of a nervous child left alone in the dark. But it was a man who wept, and in a man such tears are terrible.

Mary Gaskell hurried back into the room, and in the dim light she could see Roy stretched along the sofa, his face hidden in the cushions. His whole body was shaking.

"My dear, what is it?"

He turned to her like a child.

"Mother—mother!"

She was on her knees, and he clung to her, pressing his face against her bosom. The shade had fallen off, but in the dim light she could not see his eyes.

"Mother—mother! I'm nearly blind!"

For a moment the blood seemed to falter and stiffen in her brain. She gasped; her arms were limp about him; horror prevailed. Then she reacted as Tom Richardson had prophesied. She was the mother clasping her stricken child, consumed by furious compassion, doubly strong in the uprising of her love.

"Oh, my dear—my boy! What have they done to you? The shame—the cruelty! And you were so brave! There—there, mother's here—mother's with you! Just cry your heart out, dear; put your arms round me. I understand."

She let him weep, feeling that Nature was wise in such matters, and that tears may save a man from desperate ends. And even her own anguish was pierced by a swift exultation as he clung to her—the mother.

Presently he gained some control of himself and was able to speak.

"I'm sorry, mother—to play the coward like this. I held out all right—until I got home."

"It is not cowardice, dear."

"Somehow, I couldn't help it. You have been so awfully good to me, mother. I realised it all when I saw men down over there, and felt what a selfish fool I had been."

She kissed his forehead.

"We will forget all that. Life has to teach us, dear. Wait! I will go and fetch the lamp, and then we shall not be disturbed."

He let her go, but when she returned with the lamp he held out his arms to her. The horror of the darkness was upon him.

"Mother—don't leave me!"

She flew to him with a cry of inarticulate tenderness. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, my child—my little son—for you are my 'little son' once more! You have come back to me; you are mine—all mine!"

He put up his hands and felt her face.

"I'm useless, mother. I shan't be able to earn a penny. It makes me feel savage to think that you will have to keep me."

"Don't—don't! But—oh, what a selfish wretch I am! My dear, all that is mine is yours. Don't you understand what it means to a mother?"

She sat beside his bed that night, for he was loath for her to leave him, and would not let go of her hand. And presently he fell into a deep sleep, his hand clasping hers like the hand of a child.

There was a tremor of exultation in her heart, like the cry of a bird in the greyness of a sad dawn. Her boy had come back to her.

* * * *

A week later Tom Richardson came back to lunch, and Gwen met him.

"Well?" she queried.

"Better than I thought. McGavin saw him this morning, and was quite hopeful. Of course, his sight will never be anything very great."

"But he will see?"

"Oh, quite decently."

Gwen turned away to hide her eyes.

"Mary's glad?"

"In heaven! I think she wanted to kiss me!"

"You dear old idiot! Why didn't you?"

"Perhaps I did!"

"He cannot stop us, nor will he, I think, follow us."
 "Yet he was a masterful man—the master that I am not."
 "I had to modify my pace to his frail endurance."

"I have followed her round the ridge," he said.

"As quickly as possible we hurried on, through street after street, until at last the long line of the Embankment lights were spread out before us; and far away saw Marjorie Fair speeding eastward. As we gained upon her she turned abruptly riverwards on to the Temple Road. As quietly as possible we approached, and under the strong light of the lamp we saw her resting against the ivy wall. Her rich fur cloak had slipped from her shoulders, and the shadows round her throat and in her hair gleamed sharply.

She stood looking into the river. She seemed to be estimating the leap into the flowing blackness beside that other, in which she had all but taken; to gaze the darkness by its darkness, fair by its despair; to try to probe, to cover, this liquid abyss for the secrets those Infinite Depths into which such an unfruitful soul might cast itself.

"Hensel glanced at me appealingly. What could we do? I gave him the violin. It never occurred to him to wonder at its appearance from under my coat; it never occurred to him to question what he should do. The moment it was at his chin the Dream Song crept into the night.

"The sweet music was so mysteriously low that it seemed but a recurrence of the air as she and as I had already heard it, when it had converted her fleetingly into a woman to whom the horrid enticements of the river would have fallen a world away.

"She straightened herself slowly, and her hands met on her breast. Her face was raised to the stars. Meditatively she turned and moved back up the steps. I looked away as she went up to the player, and, putting her arms round his neck, her head falling on his shoulders, brought an end to the soul music with which at last he had succeeded in winning her back.

"As I moved homeward I saw the couple in the distance walking towards Charing Cross. The woman had her arm round the old man, supporting him very tenderly. His long quest was over at last.

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THE MOTHER

By WARWICK DEERING



SHE was a very slim little woman with a soft brown hair, quiet eyes, and a sensitive mouth. The table was covered with flowers and vases, and she was arranging the flowers in the vases while she talked to the girl who sat on the end of the Chesterfield sofa.

"No, I have decided not to go to Tilbury, Gwen. I shall just stay here, and meet him at the station. Men don't like to be fussed. And I want to have everything ready. It is strange to think that I haven't seen him for two whole years."

The girl on the sofa watched Mary Gaskell with a pair of wise blue eyes. Her face and hands were brown, and she was too strongly built to be completely feminine. She looked at life with a certain unsexed frankness. A man of forty chastened by experience would have admired her. A mere cub would have left her on the other side of the room, perhaps because some raw instinct warned him that he might be mishandled.

"I wonder if Roy has changed?"
 The mother glanced at her with innocent surprise.

"Changed? Why should he change? Of course, he is older, and he has seen more of the world. How can a mere boy spend two years in India without developing? But it will be the same Roy."

She was silent a moment, and smiling as she put the last touches to a vase of carnations.

"Do you know, Gwen, dear, I feel so young. You wouldn't think that I am fifty-two, would you? Roy and I were always such chums. I shall have him for six whole months, and I have made such plans. Yes, I've been saving up for this—for his holiday."

Her face was radiant.
 "I haven't been able to sleep properly for a week," and she laughed. "I wonder if he feels like that? Oh, and I want to show you his room. I have had it done up, and I've bought a new carpet."

Gwen followed her upstairs. The girl

was in a serious and sceptical mood, not because she had no warm blood in her, but because she knew Roy's mother so well, and loved her very deeply. She remembered that this lonely woman had been living for that boy gone soldiering in India, that she had been counting the days since she had heard that he was coming home on leave. Mary Gaskell was utterly and terribly happy. Gwen Richardson could not escape from the haunting thought that a mother's love is so often fated to suffer bitter pain.

Mary Gaskell threw open the door of the room with all the pride of anticipation. It was very pathetic this room. Hours of forethought had been spent on it, all the little details studied lovingly.

"Don't you like that carpet?"
 "I do. It is just the shade of rose that pleases me."

"And, you see, I have had the bed curtains off so that Roy can use the room as a den if he wants to be alone. I bought that club-chair last week. Do try it."

Gwen tried the chair. It was low, and ample and sumptuous, padded a foot deep, and to the tune of a good many guineas.

"Perfect. You'll spoil him."

The mother smiled.

"Oh, no. It makes me so happy. And Roy never showed any signs of being spoiled."

Gwen Richardson had her doubts, but she did not confess to them.

It was a radiant May evening when the cab called at Mrs. Gaskell's villa to take her to the station. She was flushed, and all a-thrill like a young girl. In the gardens along the road red may and laburnum were in bloom, and beds of tulips shone like lamps of red and gold where the evening sunlight touched them. Thrushes were singing, and Mary Gaskell's mood was theirs.

The cab drove through the town just as the shops were lighting up. Sandbourne

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was gay, prosperous, yet a little plutocratic. The streets were busy; the gongs of the trams clanged cheerfully; at the corner by the station the flower-seller was still at her post.

Mary Gaskell stopped the cab and bought a bunch of violets, paying the woman double.

"My son is just home from India, and I am going to meet him."

The flower woman was an old friend of hers, and she beamed.

"Take a bunch for 'im, m'am. A present from old Sarah."

Mary Gaskell found herself on the platform. She walked up and down, and kept glancing at the clock. There was a tremor of exultation in her throat.

She stopped and questioned a station porter.

"Is the London train late?"

"No, mum. She's been signalled from May Hill."

She listened for the roar of the train in the tunnel. A light appeared, a friendly, blinking eye. Mary Gaskell stood still, her right hand clasping the stalks of the violets very tightly. Her mouth was quivering, and her eyes were all soft light.

The train drew up. Doors were opening. And suddenly the mother darted forward with a quick catching of her breath.

"Roy!"

She had seen him before he had seen her. He turned, with the imperturbability of a young man who had a horror of appearing in a hurry.

"Hallo, mater, how are you?"

Her hands went to his shoulders, and she put up her face to kiss him.

"Oh, my dear, it is really you!"

His eyes did not answer hers. He kissed her rather perfunctorily, and began looking about for a porter.

She was just the slightest bit dashed, and her sensitive face lost some of its radiance.

"You must be tired, dear."

"Oh no. Here, porter, my luggage is in the back. A portmanteau and two suit-cases. Take this bag with you; there's a hat-box in the rack. Gaskell, that's the name."

"Yessir."

"I've got a cab, Roy."

"We'll have a taxi."

"But the cab's waiting, dear. I ordered it from Templeman's."

"Oh, all right! Hasn't old Templeman got rid of his crocks yet? They always were antediluvian."

Mother and son stood a moment under a gas lamp, waiting for the luggage, and Mary Gaskell's eyes could not leave her son's face. He was a tallish fellow, spruce, good-looking in rather a lifeless way. A little tight moustache covered his upper lip. His eyes were too hard and too staring, his voice too throaty and self-assured.

"Hang the chap, what a time he is!"

"Hungry, dear?"

"So so. Here he comes."

They drove through the soft dusk to that commonplace little villa, ruling its strip of garden among villas equally commonplace and unemotional. Roy Gaskell sat and stared out of the cab window, and talked to his mother as though he were talking to some stranger he had met casually in a drawing-room. He was utterly unalive to all the self-smothered tenderness that yearned towards him from the slim figure at his side. She wanted to hold his hand, but was telling herself that men hated to be fussed.

"Here we are, dear."

Roy Gaskell was not a creature of subtle impressions, but he was depressed by the villa's smallness and by its inconclusive situation. It struck him as a poky little place. He had come back a pretentious young man; other fellows people had town houses and places in the country; it annoyed him that he could not boast of such things, that this home of his was so "beastly suburban."

"I'll show you your room, Roy."

"All right, mater; I know the way. Don't bother."

But she was half-way up the stairs, and he had to follow her. She threw open the door with the air of a mother discovering a Christmas tree to a bevy of children. A lamp with a pink shade had been lit; the room looked very dainty and comfortable.

Roy Gaskell walked in, glanced casually at the big chair, and tossed a handbag on to the bed. He appeared to see nothing, to be aware of nothing singular. The room was just a room, nothing more.

"You see, dear, you can draw that cur-

was gay, prosperous, yet a little plutocratic. The streets were busy; the gongs of the trams clanged cheerfully; at the corner by the station the flower-seller was still at her post.

Mary Gaskell stopped the cab and bought a bunch of violets, paying the woman double.

"My son is just home from India, and I am going to meet him."

The flower woman was an old friend of hers, and she beamed.

"Take a bunch for 'im, m'am. A present from old Sarah."

Mary Gaskell found herself on the platform. She walked up and down, and kept glancing at the clock. There was a tremor of exultation in her throat.

She stopped and questioned a station porter.

"Is the London train late?"

"No, mum. She's been signalled from May Hill."

She listened for the roar of the train in the tunnel. A light appeared, a friendly, blinking eye. Mary Gaskell stood still, her right hand clasping the stalks of the violets very tightly. Her mouth was quivering, and her eyes were all soft light.

The train drew up. Doors were opening. And suddenly the mother darted forward with a quick catching of her breath.

"Roy!"

She had seen him before he had seen her. He turned, with the imperturbability of a young man who had a horror of appearing in a hurry.

"Hallo, mater, how are you?"

Her hands went to his shoulders, and she put up her face to kiss him.

"Oh, my dear, it is really you!"

His eyes did not answer hers. He kissed her rather perfunctorily, and began looking about for a porter.

She was just the slightest bit dashed, and her sensitive face lost some of its radiance.

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"You see, dear, you can draw that curtain

and shut off the bed. I thought you'd like to use the room as a den."

Her face was pathetically expectant.

"All right, mater. I'll just have a wash. Ask the fellow to carry my things up here."

She retreated, grievously disappointed and trying to laugh at herself for feeling so.

Roy Gaskell ate the dinner that had been prepared for him; he did not say that he enjoyed it, but he did ask for whisky, and there was no whisky in the house. His mother blushed as though she had sinned. And that dinner was to have been a kind of sacramental meal; she had planned it all herself. It was very absurd—she confessed—that she should have expected him to be impressed by it; probably it may have seemed a very ordinary sort of meal to a man used to dining at the mess.

When he had drunk his coffee and smoked a cigarette he showed a restlessness that was not lost upon his mother. She was waiting for him to talk to her about innumerable things. She told herself that he was tired.

"If you would like to go to bed, dear—"

He stared.

"No, thanks, mater. If you don't mind I'll just run out and have a look round. Anything on at the theatre?"

She looked at him breathlessly.

"I really don't know, dear."

"I'll go—and chance it. I say, have you got a latchkey? Don't sit up, mater."

He never asked her to go with him; it did not even occur to him that she would care to be asked. She heard the front door close. He had left her alone the very first evening of his return. She got out her fancy work and tried to busy herself with it, but she was wounded; the stitches went all awry. She waited, and waited, and presently went to bed.

Roy Gaskell had been at home a week before he met Gwen Richardson. As girl and boy they had been comrades, and in some ways rivals. Gwen had recollections of a squabble that had ended in a rough and tumble, and she remembered how the boy had been shocked and disgusted at her strength. He had left for India with the idea that he was in love with Gwen Richardson, but since then he

had discovered "woman" in a far more exuberant and flaunting intimacy.

"Well, Roy."

"Hallo! Gwen."

She had seen that he had wished to pass her by, pretending to be vastly interested in a motor-boat that was running towards the harbour. He looked very annoyed, and then hid his annoyance behind a starched cheerfulness. Gwen had trapped him in the narrow space between the edge of the sea-wall and the bandstand close to the pier.

They stared at each other, and Gaskell was asking himself how he had managed to think the girl pretty.

"Funny I shouldn't have seen you before."

"Is it? I have been to your place several times."

"Yes, I believe the mater said something about it."

"But you always happened to be out."

There was a severity about her that puzzled Roy Gaskell, but when he had provided himself with a possible explanation, he was tempted to laugh. So the silly fool had been sentimentalising about him! Perhaps she had kept his photo in her bedroom!

"Sorry, Gwen. You and the mater must be pretty thick."

She looked at him steadily with her calm and rather merciless eyes.

"I am very fond of your mother. Often she is very lonely."

"Then why does she live in such a beast of a place, full of old women and retired tradesmen. Besides—"

"Well?"

"I don't believe the mater really minds being alone. Some people don't, you know. She potters about in the garden, and makes tea-cloths, and reads. Jolly weather, isn't it? I had a bathe this morning, and swam as far as the point. I am just off to see the secretary of the 'Downs' Cricket Club; may be glad for me to play for them this season."

He was growing fidgety. His eyes kept looking past her, and he was waiting for her to free him.

"You've changed, Roy—somehow, I had a presentiment that you would be different."

He laughed.

"I was a raw kid when I went out. India makes a man of one. Well, so

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long. Gwen. I shall miss my man if I don't hustle."

She let him go, and then, obeying a sudden impulse, turned and followed him. The whole "atmosphere" of the man had a special significance. She noticed the crease in his trousers, the way he carried his cane and turned out his elbows with a superabundance of youthful self-satisfaction. Every detail was of vast importance—the handkerchief tucked up his sleeve, the tint of a tie, the set of his hat.

Gwen Richardson stopped abruptly, and leant against the railing of the esplanade.

"I thought you were fibbing, my friend."

She had seen him gravitate in the direction of a flamboyantly dressed young woman who was lolling in a deck-chair under a pink parasol. Master Roy's hat came off with *empressement*. There was a vacant chair near. He drew it up, and sat down as though he had reached the ultimate goal of the morning. Gwen Richardson moved away, while Mr. Gaskell was fully occupied with the mature young woman under the pink parasol.

She tried to be fair to Roy as she considered the situation. She was not in love with him; pique did not enter into her attitude towards Roy Gaskell. It was her first experience of the blind and buoyant selfishness of youth, and it angered her and made her sad. She knew that months of expectation had been lavished on this man-boy's home-coming, and already she had felt the pain that Mary Gaskell's sensitive tenderness was bearing.

Roy's mother was just a woman who provided him with meals and additional pocket-money. He took everything as a matter of course, went his own way, used her but was not hers. Gwen had watched that look of wistfulness increase on the mother's face. Mary Gaskell had given her boy to the world; and the man who had returned was a stranger—a stranger who gave her a little casual conversation, but not a shred of the self that she had created, and suffered in creating.

Gwen kept house for her brother, a young doctor who had taken over his father's practice in Sandbourne. Brother and sister were the very best of comrades; they resembled each other in physique and in character, the brother

being sturdy, with a good virile head set upon strong shoulders, keen eyes, and a humorous but laconic mouth.

He came in late for lunch that morning, a successful man cheerfully humbled. Gwen was lighting the spirit lamp under the coffee machine, frowning slightly, with an air of preoccupation.

"Sorry to be late——"

"I have had my lunch, Tom."

"That's right. I have got to motor over to Pilstead this afternoon. Care to come——"

She looked up suddenly.

"Could we take Mrs. Gaskell?"

"Of course. I can drive and leave Parsons at home. But won't she be taken up with Master Mars?"

Gwen leant forward with her elbows on the table.

"I met Roy this morning, Tom."

"I had that honour two days ago. He's superb."

She frowned impatiently.

"He's a tragedy, Tom."

"A very gay one!"

"Oh, don't be funny! Roy is the most ghastly anti-climax. You men don't half understand the woman's outlook upon life. I have been watching Mary Gaskell for a week. Do you think it amuses her to find that she has been living on dreams?"

"Cut me some bread, dear. Roy has come back a conceited cub, but, after all, many of us have to go through the collar and cuff phase. We don't take very comprehensive and sympathetic views at three-and-twenty."

"Oh, nonsense. Isn't it just a question of heart? Mary Gaskell has simply lived for that boy. I don't suppose any man ever realises what he—as a man—has meant to his mother. But to come back after two years, and to treat your mother as though she were just an amiable housekeeper! It makes me savage."

"That's the tragedy, Gwen. Women expect too much; men give too little."

"And hasn't she a right to expect something? It's pitiful. She tries to keep a bright face, but I know that she is most horribly hurt and disappointed. Oh, the selfishness of young people!"

Tom Richardson smiled at her affectionately.

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Tom Richardson smiled at her affectionately.

"It is because you don't happen to be

selfish, Gwen, that you are rather hard on the boy. Give him his chance. I dare say he will improve."

"Wonder?"

"Well, run round and ask Mary to come with us. She may like the drive."

Gwen Richardson's distrust of Roy Gaskell's ultimate attitude towards his mother appeared likely to be justified as the weeks went by. Mary Gaskell had planned that Scottish trip for June; they were to go up through Edinburgh, and the pass of Killicrankie to Inverness, steam down the Caledonian Canal, visit the islands, wander back through the Trossachs, and spend a week in the English lake country on the way home. But June had reached its zenith, and Roy Gaskell passed his time playing cricket and tennis, running up to town for week-ends, and compromising himself with selfish foolishness by following at the tail of a certain young woman's skirt.

Roy Gaskell thought that Gwen had changed, and changed for the worse. She treated him very casually when they met, and appeared to attach no importance to anything he said, and since he was full of opinions, and lavish in spreading them about, he had little use for a young woman who looked bored when he was puffing the Empire in order.

He said much the same things about Gwen Richardson as she said of him to her brother.

"What's happened to Gwen, mater? Seems to me she has turned into a regular prig."

Mary Gaskell defended Gwen.

"I don't think that I should ever have called Gwen a prig, dear."

"That's how it strikes me. Gives herself the airs of a schoolmistress. She used to be a regular sport."

His mother did not argue the point. She had hoped that some day Roy would marry Gwen.

Wandering up one evening to the red villa on the hill Gwen found Mary Gaskell sitting out under the lime tree in her garden. She looked trist and a little forlorn, a lonely woman, the more lonely because her thoughts were not pleasant company.

"Roy has gone out, dear; he is dining with friends, and then going to the theatre."

"Roy always appears to be out."

"He is so popular, Gwen."

"I suppose so."

The girl had to smother her anger. She wanted to ask Mary Gaskell whether her son had ever taken her to the theatre, ever conspired to delight her with some little plan for a day's trip to London or into the country, but such questions could not be asked without humiliating Mary Gaskell's love.

Gwen approached the question of the Scottish holiday.

"When are you going to Scotland?"

Mary Gaskell answered her rather hurriedly.

"Oh, I have given it up. Roy wants to go to Germany for a month with a brother officer to improve his German."

"I see."

"And I can't afford both holidays. I should like Roy to go to Germany."

Gwen had to let her feelings find some way of escape.

"I think you are most wonderfully good to Roy."

"Do you, dear?"

The sensitive face flushed with pleasure.

"Yes—almost too good. He ought to go to Scotland with you."

"My dear, what is it to me—so long as he is happy. And I am pleased that he should be so keen on improving his German."

Gwen smothered a rush of cynicism. German indeed! It was very probable that Master Roy would find himself in Paris, or if he did invade Germany he would spend that month seeing life in Berlin.

She felt that she must speak to Roy, try to sting the young man out of his selfishness, and she asked Tom's advice.

Her brother looked grave. He happened to know more than Gwen did, and he had joined her in feeling for Mary Gaskell.

"I don't know that it would do any good, Gwen. He would be astonished. The youngster is too pleased with himself; you can't hurt very conceited people. Besides, he would tell you to mind your own business."

"I think it is my business."

"But Master Gaskell would not think so. The youngster has a lot to learn, and from what I hear he has got in with the wrong sort of people."

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"Oh, I know. I have seen him——"

"Young idiot!"

Roy Gaskell was not dining with friends that night, and was not at the theatre. Any tale was good enough for a mother like Mary Gaskell.

Master Roy was giving a little supper at the "Roma," an Italian restaurant on the sea front. His guests were the flamboyant young woman of the pink parasol, and a girl friend of hers, a "flapper" of fifteen.

They sent the "flapper" home after supper; she was dutiful, and knew how to serve her friends. The flamboyant young woman and Roy Gaskell went and watched the sea, leaning over the parade railings, with their elbows touching.

"Well, what's it to be? A picture show or a couple of deck-chairs, or a stroll along the front?"

Roy Gaskell thought himself very much the man of the world, but he was a fool of a boy in the hands of this young woman. Miss Bertha Durrant had studied ambiguities until she had been taught to assume an air of insouciant and self-protective frankness. She was clever with all the elemental feminine cleverness that had learnt how the male creature must be handled and deceived. Her physique was wholly provocative, if a little flabby. And she had had experience, and so much of it that she had come to desire finality and a permanent victim.

"I'm tired of pictures. Let's stay here."

"Just what you like. But, I say, Bertha——"

He tried to put an arm round her, but she shrugged it away.

"Don't do that—please."

"Oh, all right."

Roy Gaskell might be a conceited young fool, but so long as a woman knew how to appeal to him she could prevent him from acting like a cad. There was breed and good blood in the boy, and the woman at his side had a practical knowledge of men. Experience had taught her that the better the man, the less he is attracted by cheapness in a woman.

And so she had dressed herself up in a pretty prudery that succeeded in being all the more provoking. She aimed at seeming the super-lady, cleverly combining a frivolous audacity with a niceness that was always on its guard. Her modesty

was unimpeachable. She would let him take her out to supper, but she made him realise that she could be shocked.

"I say, Bertha, you're not huffy."

She maintained an air of chastening chilliness.

"You seem to forget that I live in Sandbourne, and that I've got a reputation."

"Well, I'm not hurting it."

"Is that your fault? It's not nice of you, Roy. A man ought to be chivalrous, and all that."

She had an expressive voice, and she had grown amazingly fastidious in her choice of words. He reacted.

"I'm sorry. You know—I think you are just——"

But she interrupted him. He was still in the dangling stage, and the lure had to be made more elusive.

"Oh, yes—I know. Let's go and listen to the band. It is still playing."

"Just as you like."

So she made him sit beside her genteely in a deck-chair under the glare of a big electric light, while she listened with every sign of critical appreciation to the band's rendering of Chaminade's "Autumn" and Bayne's fine waltz "Destiny."

"Yes, that's quite sweet. I wish they would play something by Grieg."

She hummed a melody. He was inclined to be a little fractious.

"Give me the 'Chocolate Soldier.'"

"Just popular stuff!"

She was out to impress him. Culture was what she lacked; she knew that very well. Her worldly position was somewhat ambiguous; her mother was a "decayed gentlewoman"—offensive phrase—and let "apartments" in order to add to a very limited income. Even "bluff" may be pathetic, but Bertha Durrant's insincerity was feline and practical.

A man stopped in front of them.

"Hallo—Chick!"

Roy Gaskell noticed that the fellow did not trouble to take his hat off.

Bertha Durrant looked up at him defiantly.

"Is that you, Mr. Purvis?"

The man gave a dry laugh. Even at night he was betrayed by his clothes and by his manners, a vulgar young beast who was none too sober.

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"Gwen Richardson stopped abruptly and leant against the railing of the esplanade"

"Oh, you sly little devil!"

Bertha Durrant rose.

"I think I will be getting home, Roy."

Gaskell stood up, quite ready to quarrel with the young man in the plush hat.

They moved off along the parade, Bertha Durrant glancing back over her shoulder.

"How dared that bounder come and speak to me?"

"Who is he?"

"I used to know him—but I found out that he was a cad. He's not a nice man, Roy, and he drinks like a fish; a rotter with a little money and nothing to do."

Gaskell's bristles were up.

"I believe the chap is following us."

"Don't take any notice of him. One ought to ignore such people."

The man in the plush hat kept about twenty yards behind them, but when they left the sea front and turned into a quiet residential street he quickened

his pace and drew up within half a dozen paces.

"Hallo, Chick—why so haughty—anyway?"

Bertha Durrant gave Roy Gaskell a quick side glance.

"Don't take any notice. The beast has been drinking."

"All right, but I should like to punch his head."

Mr. Purvis persisted in his pursuit, flinging offensive facetiousities at them with impartial insolence. Roy Gaskell caught a glimpse of Bertha Durrant's face as they passed under a street lamp; it looked pinched and white and furious. She was biting her lower lip.

"I say, Bertha—I can't stand this. I am going to give that beast a thrashing."

She caught his arm.

"Don't, dear. I don't want to be mixed up in a vulgar row."

"But—"

"He's beneath contempt."

Roy humoured her; he could appreciate her point of view.

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"All right. But if I catch the black-guard alone—in a quiet corner—I'll give him a lesson."

They reached the gate of Bertha Durrant's home, a tall, narrow-faced, grey villa. Steps led up from the gate to the front door. The front garden was full of scrubby euonymus and holly trees.

"Good night, Roy."

She glanced down the road, and saw Purvis waiting under a lamp.

"Don't answer that cad, Roy, if he speaks to you. Go straight home. Promise—"

But Gaskell would promise nothing.

"I can talk to him now that you are out of the way."

She gave him a suspicious and half-frightened look.

"He has been drinking. Don't let him make a scene. He is not worth troubling about. Good night."

He caught her suddenly and kissed her.

"I couldn't help it, Bertha."

She smiled at him.

"Well—I'll forgive you. You have been a dear. Leave that idiot alone. Promise!"

"Oh—all right!"

"Good night. See you to-morrow."

She ran up the steps, waved to him, and disappeared into the house.

Roy Gaskell walked back towards the figure under the gas lamp. The man was waiting for him; standing in the middle of the path.

"Hallo! So you've caught on—have you? I used to go up and down those steps before you came on the scene. I've kissed her—at the gate—just as you did, my lord."

Roy swung out into the road, his chin in the air, his nostrils quivering.

"You had better go home," he said, "or you'll get into trouble. Good night."

Purvis gave a thick laugh.

"Here—stop a moment. I'm not in the Army, thank God, but I'm as good a man as you are—and less of a fool. You stop and listen; I've got something to say."

Gaskell paused, and stood stiffly on the edge of the path. The light from the lamp fell on Purvis's face, big and white and puffy, and its expression was one of insolent hardihood.

"Don't think I'm upset because you've stepped into my shoes. She's no novelty.

You're the last of a whole blessed brigade. Now I'll just tell you—"

Young Gaskell went white.

"Look here," he said, "I promised not to bother about you. Go home and don't be a fool."

"Fool! Who's the fool?"

He began to blurt out scandalous things, and then Roy Gaskell knocked him down. The fellow was no coward, and he was strongly built. He got on his feet promptly, and in that deserted street those two young males fought it out in bitter earnest.

The soldier was something of a boxer; he had better blood in him, and he had not spent his time lounging about in hotel bars. After the first twenty seconds he had his man blown and beaten, and Purvis went to the ground.

Gaskell waited to see if the fellow meant to get up for a second bout, but Purvis sat with back to a garden wall, dazed and battered, dabbing at his nose with a crumpled handkerchief. His blood kept Roy from palavering with the cad. He pulled his collar straight, picked up his hat, and walked off in the direction of the sea.

Mary Gaskell was sitting up for Roy. The clock had struck eleven, and she was drowsing over a book when the closing of the front door roused her.

She had risen to go and meet him when he flung the drawing-room door open and walked in.

"Hallo, mater! I thought you had gone to bed."

"Roy!"

She looked at him in astonishment and alarm, for his collar was crumpled, his tie torn, his mouth swollen and bleeding, and he had a big bruise on his forehead.

"Roy—dear! What has happened to you?"

He was in a state of great excitement, that heroic excitement that makes youth so furiously irresponsible and so intolerant of opposition and restraint. He was twenty-three, and he was violently in love, and someone had blasphemed against the thing that had intoxicated him.

"It's all right, mater; I have been thrashing a cad, that's all."

"Roy, you've been fighting! My dear—"

"All right. But if I catch the black-guard alone—in a quiet corner—I'll give him a lesson."

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"Roy, you've been fighting! My dear—"

He was in the saddle, and he let him-
self go.

"I have thrashed a black-guard who dared to insult a woman, the woman I mean to marry."

Mary Gaskell looked at him mutely. She went very white, and stood absolutely still like one caught by a sudden pain of the heart. All this was news to her, a bolt from the blue.

She groped for the arm of her chair; her knees were shaking. Then she sat down, still looking at Roy with mild, astonished eyes.

"You had never told me, dear."

Her voice was very soft and quiet. She was striving to calm herself, telling herself that she should have foreseen some such crisis. But her quietude irritated Roy; he was in a melodramatic mood, a tearing, blank verse temper that listed to spout fire and to deal blows.

"Well, I meant to tell you. You'll like her, mater; of course you'll like her. She's a lady, but her mother's not well off. I hadn't said anything definite, but this cad has settled things. He dared to say that she was an adventuress. I thrashed him. And to-morrow I shall ask her to marry me."

Mary Gaskell looked at him helplessly. He was walking up and down, pushing the chairs out of his way, his eyes ablaze. This sexual explosion dazed her. It was all so new and strange and unexpected. She was discovering the crude and passionate male in the child that she had borne, and she did not know how to deal with the phenomenon. Her one inspiration, a woman's inspiration, spoke of self-sacrifice.

"Of course, dear—I will help you. Tell me everything. Do I know her—already?"

He stood on the hearthrug, and held forth.

"Her name's Bertha Durrant. Her mother is a doctor's widow. They are not well off, but what does that matter? She is the only woman I have ever cared for—"

How many mothers have listened to such vapourings, and felt sick at heart perhaps, and mistrustful of the future? It is the ultimate fate of those who have had to give everything, hoping that the bread that they have cast upon the waters may return to them. A young man's

love is a merciless, selfish flame. All other loves are consumed by it like so much oil, and Roy Gaskell was an ordinary young man, rather more selfish and passionate than most youngsters of his age.

Mary Gaskell listened like one whose thoughts were elsewhere. She was thinking of the little chap playing in his nursery, or tearing up and down the garden path and puffing like an engine. Trivial memories flashed into her mind. She remembered him running to her with a cut knee, and complaining that the ground had hit him. And now he came to her as the young man, issuing ultimatums, not asking to be comforted, not counting very much upon the importance of her sympathy.

"You must bring her to see me, Roy."

For the first time he looked at her with less assurance. The two women were such contrasts that even he was struck by the incongruity of the thing.

"Of course. You'll like her."

He thrust a sense of discomfort away from him.

"I should have told you earlier, mater, but I wasn't quite sure of myself."

His mother rose and kissed him.

"Your happiness is everything, dear. I hope she is worthy of you—that she will make you a good wife."

He became gauche and self-conscious.

"That's all right, mater. I think I'll go and have a wash, and then turn in. You shouldn't have sat up for me."

He went to bed, and, despite the fever of youth, he slept. Mary Gaskell spent an hour on her knees, praying. She did not sleep as Roy slept; she had to struggle with herself, to compel herself to accept surrender.

Some days later Gwen Richardson returned home in great wrath, and found her brother practising putting on the lawn at the back of the house.

"Tom, come in—will you?"

She stood at the French window of his study, a very intense young woman with determined eyes.

Her brother, with a characteristic crouch, holed a long putt, and smiled happily.

"What's the matter, old girl?"

"I want to speak to you."

"Oh, all right!"

He strolled in, and she closed the

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window. One had to be careful when one's strip of privacy lay sandwiched between other strips where maiden ladies sat out in garden chairs.

"Tom!"

"What's the matter?"

"Roy Gaskell has got engaged to that Durrant girl."

"What!"

Tom Richardson was a fairly stolid person, but his air of playful relaxation vanished instantly.

"Got engaged to the Durrant girl! Great Caesar! But surely——"

Gwen threw herself into a chair. She had just passed through a fierce emotional experience.

"Yes; I've just come from there. She told me; she's heartbroken. It happened days ago. She had the girl to the house; she knew nothing; then was ready to make the best of it. But we women are quick, Tom, at reading other women. We are not easily deceived. She knew at once, guessed at once. It is not merely that the girl is vulgar. Mary saw her through and through. She tried to warn Roy, and he was furious——"

"Young fool!"

"They have had three miserable days. He is on stilts, with his dignity in the air, playing the man of honour. Mary broke down with me, told me everything, asked me what I knew of the girl."

"And you told her?"

She winced.

"Tom, I had to. It was only honest. I had heard it from you, about young Merriman. It was in confidence—of course. I am going to speak to Roy; he has been running up all sorts of debts, too. It's abominable!"

"Confound it, what messes these crude youngsters make of life! The girl's impossible; I happen to know. But look here, Gwen—I can't see you tackling Roy."

"I can——"

"Listen to me, the youngster's a powder mine. You'll get scorched. These affairs can be devilish nasty——"

He stood staring out of the window.

"No; it's better that you should keep out of it, Gwen. If it is anybody's business, it is a man's business. I might be able to do something."

"You always were a sort of hero with Roy, Tom."

"That's an ancient myth by now. I'll think it over. Poor Mary Gaskell must be pretty miserable."

"I know how unhappy she is. Only desperation would have made her confess to me about Roy. And she had hoped for so much, not selfishly; she counted on being his comrade, and he has treated her as though she were an old nurse!"

Dr. Thomas Richardson had a country visit that afternoon, and as his car passed the upper end of Wilton Park, he saw a man and a girl leaning against a gate and looking towards the sea. It was but a momentary glimpse he had of them, yet he recognised Roy Gaskell and Bertha Durrant. Roy was staring sulkily at the horizon; the girl appeared to be voicing a grievance, and her profile was the profile of a woman in a temper.

"Why hasn't your mother been to see us? I suppose she's ashamed of us—because we have to let rooms and live in a back street. I hate snobs; I can tell you they make me feel bitter."

Young Gaskell tried to pacify her. This aping of a sensitive pride was part of her campaign. She had caught her man, and she was testing the strength of her influence over him.

"Let things alone for a day or two, Bertha. You know what mothers are. I'm an only son."

"Oh, I know! But it has hurt me. I suppose I am just as fond of my mother as you are of yours. If you really cared——"

He betrayed a sudden impatience.

"Do you think I like it? It makes me angry; women are so unreasonable. I am doing my best. My mater is soft-hearted enough; she will come round in a few days."

She shrugged her shoulders, but she saw that she could strain the situation no further.

"All right, dear; I'll be patient. I'm rather impulsive and hot tempered, and you wouldn't like me to have no pride, would you?"

They drew closer together, and his arm went round her.

"Of course not, Chick-a-biddy. I'm proud of you. People always seem to kick up such a fuss over these affairs. I know I can bring the mater round."

But in this he boasted beyond his powers. Mary Gaskell, the quiet, sensi-

window. One had to be careful when one's strip of privacy lay sandwiched between other strips where maiden ladies sat out in garden chairs.

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But in this he boasted beyond his powers. Mary Gaskell, the quiet, sensi-

ble, unselfish woman, displayed an absolute strength that surprised her son. She did no bitter things; she was very gentle and very generous, but she utterly refused to recognise the situation as a failure. It was as though her honour felt itself concerned. She refused to consent to see him sacrifice himself. He could not move her, and his failure made him peevish and brutal.

The first time I ask for a really serious thing, you go against me and won't listen to reason. I suppose all mothers are selfish."

She did not flinch at the bitter taunt, but looked at him pathetically, smiling with infinite wisdom.

"No, dear; I am not being selfish. Once when you were very tiny—you wanted to pull the coals out of the fire, and I had to drag you away. Was that selfishness?"

Her calmness exasperated him. She seemed to be so sure of herself.

"Oh, rot, mater! I'm not an infant—now. It's all prejudice on your part, because the girl has no money—"

"Roy! To think that you should accuse me of that!"

He flushed.

"Well, perhaps it isn't that. But you don't want another woman to have me. I can't help it; I'm a man. Do listen to reason."

She sighed.

"My dear, I shall not stand in the way when the real woman comes. I am trying to keep you for her, and you won't understand."

He gave it up; she was unanswerable in that she would take no answer; but he was savagely determined to go his own way.

As for that trip into Germany it had passed into the limbo of things fated never to be accomplished. There was no longer any inclination for it; moreover, funds were lacking. Mary Gaskell had had to pay some heavy bills for her son; her income was not elastic; the money that she had saved for that Scottish trip had been swallowed up.

And Miss Durrant was a luxury in herself. Roy had given her presents, bought her a fine diamond and sapphire ring; but his ready money had come to an end, and in the circumstances he could not beg more money from his

mother. The situation was exasperating to a rather profuse young man energetically in love. One could not carry one's fiancée about on credit, and one or two tradesmen had sent in bills with a polite intimation that a settlement would be desirable.

Roy Gaskell was driven to the idea of borrowing. He ran over the list of friends and acquaintances, and it was to Tom Richardson that he went. Gwen's brother had met him once or twice during the last week, and had gone out of his way to be friendly.

Roy Gaskell put his own construction on this same friendliness.

"Tom Richardson's a man of the world. He understands. Not like that prig of a sister of his. He always was a good sort."

Yet Roy Gaskell shirked meeting that prig of a sister, and he caught Tom Richardson as he was getting out of his car after an afternoon's round.

"Can I speak to you, Tom?"

"Rather. Come in and have some tea—"

"I don't know—"

"Gwen is out. Come along in, man."

Richardson—as a doctor—was an adept at handling people. He had magnetism, and he was very shrewd. He appeared to take complete control of Roy Gaskell without the youngster realising that he was being led. Tom was a good fellow, so confoundedly sensible, not a bit prejudiced. Roy lit a pipe. He felt himself back in a hearty, frank, male atmosphere. It seemed quite easy to ask Gwen's brother to lend him money.

And Tom Richardson seemed amazingly ready to lend it.

"That's all right, Roy. I'll send you four fivers round to-morrow. How will that do?"

"I say, it's awfully decent of you."

"Not a bit."

Tom Richardson had won the first move. He had to win the confidence of this restive and rebellious young male, and he won it so well that Roy Gaskell began to pour his version of the "great affair" into Richardson's ears.

"I expect you've heard about it."

Tom confessed that he had. He lured Roy on with an air of sympathy.

"I've been having a devil of a time, I can tell you. The mater has turned

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into a regular frost. It's a pleasure to be able to talk to a man—a man of the world. The girl might be an utter bad lot by the way some people have been behaving. I'm going to marry her; I'd marry her to spite them."

Tom did not show his true colours. He let Roy Gaskell fume and protest and explain. He even allowed him to carry away the impression that he—Tom Richardson—thoroughly approved of the attitude he had taken up. Tom believed in Russian strategy. His ultimate attack would be all the more deadly.

People who frequented the sea front at Sandbourne were familiar with the figure of a young man who was drawn up and down in a bath-chair. He was a consumptive, and a doomed man, and his pale eyes seemed to stare with a dull resignation at the life that drifted past him. The disease had refined him. His face looked the colour of ivory, and in his poor neck all the muscles and tendons showed.

Bertha Durrant always avoided the young man's bath-chair as though it carried the white death. She was afraid of him, and dared not meet those pale eyes. There were reasons.

Paul Merriman was Dr. Richardson's patient, and Tom Richardson had a full knowledge of how Merriman had passed his life. The nearness of death had changed the man, etherealised him, filled him with a new and more human sympathy.

Tom Richardson took Paul Merriman into his confidence. The sick man had not been blind. He had watched Roy Gaskell marching in chains, the captive of that flamboyant young woman, and Paul Merriman had pitied him.

Tom told him everything.

"It's the woman at home who is suffering. She sees the tragedy of it plainly, but the youngster is blindly obstinate: I want to get him away from that girl."

Paul Merriman was sitting at his window overlooking the trees of the park. There were flowers on the table beside him. His skin looked like wax.

"I might do something, Richardson."

"Could you?"

"I haven't long to live. What does it matter to me if I find myself sued in the courts. It would be a good piece of

work to end one's life with. I suppose the boy is touchy?"

"Like fire. Supposing I bring him to see you quite casually. I could manage it."

"Do. I'll feel my way."

Thus began Roy Gaskell's acquaintanceship with the man of the bath-chair. Richardson manœuvred him into Merriman's rooms, and they had tea together. This scheme of his soon betrayed significant developments.

Roy and Miss Durrant were walking along the sea front when Paul Merriman's chair came along, drawn by an ancient man with a long white beard. It was like Father Time drawing Death. Bertha Durrant suddenly discovered that she wanted to look at the shops across the road.

"Wait a moment—there's Merriman. I want to speak to the poor beggar. Come and be introduced."

The startled look in her eyes surprised him.

"You know him?"

"Yes. Come along."

But she turned aside.

"I can't. That man makes me shiver. He's like a corpse going about—it's horrible."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense. Do come away. I want to look at those new French hats over there."

Roy surrendered to her, but he was puzzled. Bertha Durrant was not usually so sensitive, so capable of being affected by subtle impressions.

Then matters moved with dramatic suddenness. Paul Merriman had a severe hæmorrhage; it brought death much nearer; he could not go out to watch the sea, the holiday folk, and the children at play.

One morning Roy Gaskell had a note from him:

"DEAR GASKELL,

"Will you come and see me? I should like to have a chat with you. I have been very bad. Richardson has given me up. Humour a sick man.—Yours sincerely,

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Roy went. He found Merriman lying in a reclining chair by the open window.

He looked as bloodless as a piece of marble, but his eyes were bright.

"It's good of you to come, Gaskell. I have got something to say to you."

Roy looked at him in surprise.

"Oh!"

"In a dying man, you know, and I have got something on my mind. I had been watching you for some weeks before Richardson brought us together. Sit down. It's serious."

Roy sat down, wondering what was coming.

"I don't suppose I shall live another month. You must take what I am going to say as the true and solemn confession of a dying man. I am going to tell you the truth—because I think you ought to know it. Don't get angry with me. It's too serious for that."

Roy Gaskell sat there and listened. At first his face hardened; a queer, threatening light came into his eyes. He did not utter a word. And then the voice of the doomed man seemed to magnetise him. He listened, motionless, bleak faced, staring straight before him at the trees in the park.

Merriman finished speaking. His eyes lost their brightness; he looked exhausted, though he had nerved himself for an effort and was ready to fall in a languor of fatalism now that the thing was done.

"That's the truth, Gaskell. I wanted you to know. You are young, and you have your life to live. It is not a pleasant thing to have to tell a man, but there you are—I have done it."

Roy Gaskell had nothing to say. He did not ask Paul Merriman any questions. There seemed no questions to ask. He was dazed, sobered, yet horribly conscious of the fact that this dying man had stretched out a cold hand, and turned his romance into a mockery and a madness.

He got up.

"I didn't know all this. It's rather a sudden smash up. Of course, I know you must be telling the truth."

Merriman smiled at him faintly.

"I dare say you hate me, Gaskell, at this moment. But some day—if you take the warning I have given you, you will bless me."

"Oh, I suppose so. I want to think things out. I'll come and see you again to-morrow."

He escaped, sullen, feverish and angry. The thing that Merriman had told him had filled him with passionate nausea and disgust. For a while he tried not to believe it, but somehow that dying man's voice haunted him and carried conviction. What a mockery! And all this explained that inexplicable dread of hers, her fear of the White Death in the wheeled chair. A passionate reaction seized him. He began to realise that he had been fooled, and his self-love rose in wrath.

He walked miles, aimlessly, in a rage of restlessness. Then an idea dawned on him. Tom Richardson was responsible for this. Tom knew what Merriman knew. He set off in the direction of Richardson's house.

The doctor was in. He saw by Roy Gaskell's face that something had happened.

"Hallo! Stay and have some tea with me."

Roy plunged straight into confidences, yet with an air of accusation.

"I have been to see Merriman. He wrote and asked me to go and see him. He has been telling me the most damnable things—about her."

"Sit down, old chap—"

"I can't sit down. It's absurd. But look here, Richardson, did you know?"

"Know what?"

"About this—about her?"

Tom nodded.

"Oh yes; I knew."

"Good heavens, and you never told me!"

He was walking up and down like a leopard in a cage. Richardson went and put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him into a chair.

"Sit down there. We have got to thrash this out together like men. Keep cool and face the artillery."

His imperturbable kindness dominated Roy.

"My dear boy, I happened to know all this—but, frankly, you were in no temper to listen to reason. You would have told me to mind my own business. So I thought of bringing you into touch with Merriman, the actual man who knew and who had suffered. He was eager to warn you—whatever might come of it. He has warned you, and he has told you the truth."

Roy sat and stared at the carpet. The

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beginnings of a great humiliation were upon him.

"I suppose you think me an almighty fool."

"Nonsense! Am I a model of rectitude and wisdom? I nearly landed myself in the same sort of mess when I was a student."

"I can't marry her."

"Marry her! You would be committing suicide."

"What am I to do?"

"Why, break it off."

"How?"

"Write and tell her that something has happened to make you change your mind."

"Yes, and a nice row there will be!"

Richardson stood in front of him and spoke with emphasis:

"No, there will be nothing of the kind. The girl is no fool, Roy; she will guess what has happened. One word from Merriman would silence her. She dares not make a stir against you; she knows quite well that any spite she might show would come back on her, and rightly so. Don't worry about that. Even if there were some sort of a scandal, it would be worth while facing it to get free."

Gaskell looked sullen and depressed.

"But I shall be meeting her!"

"Good heavens, man, you would face a line of bayonets, and you are afraid of a woman who has tried to make a fool of you! Well, perhaps it would not be a bad idea for you to clear out of Sandbourne for a while. Look here, Roy. I am off to Switzerland in three days for my holiday. Come with me. Why not?"

Gaskell's eyes met his with a flash of gratitude and relief.

"I say, it's awfully good of you, Tom, but I haven't any money."

"That can be arranged."

"I am not going to ask the mater for money."

He betrayed a sudden strange bitterness against his mother.

"The mater was right. She'll smile, and be sweet and sorry for me. I won't stand it, and I won't take money from her."

Richardson looked at him gravely.

"If you feel like that, Roy, for heaven's sake keep it to yourself. I

don't think you appreciate your mother. She is the best woman I ever met."

"She's too good."

"Don't say things that you will be sorry for—savagely sorry for—some day. I'll produce the money; I'm a flourishing person. You can repay me when you like. We start on Friday. That's settled."

Roy nodded.

"What about writing to her?"

He wanted to get it over.

"Sit down at my desk and write all once. I'll see that it is posted. Then you can draw a deep breath."

An hour later Roy Gaskell found himself within view of the little red brick villa that he used as an hotel. He took a very lively disinclination to meet his mother. His pride and his self-love were sore, and he found it difficult to forgive her for having been in the right. It was the egoist's attitude; he was disgusted with life, and tempted to tumble into a futile cynicism. After all, why should he tell her anything? She would discover the truth in due season. He was not going to apologise, to confess that he had been made a fool of.

He found her in the front garden snipping off dead roses. There was no chance of slipping in casually, and so avoiding a formal return. For Roy Gaskell was in an overstrung mood; he imagined that his mother expected a crisis, and was on the watch, and he was not in a temper to be stared at questioningly.

"Have you had tea, dear?"

"Yes—thanks."

He strolled straight up the path to the front door with an air of detachment that concealed nothing.

"I have a few letters to write."

He went in, closing the door after him, leaving his mother standing at gaze. If he had expected to deceive her, he was a very great fool. That sensitive love of hers made her wondrous intuitive.

At dinner that night Roy was sulky and self-absorbed, but he managed to tell his mother that he was going abroad with Tom Richardson. He made the announcement quite casually, as though it were a custom of his to fly off across Europe at three days' notice like any cosmopolite with unlimited cash.

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His mother did not betray any surprise. She knew a great deal more than Roy imagined.

"I'm so glad. Where do you and Tom think of going?"

"Oh—Switzerland."

"That's splendid. Tom knows Switzerland very well; he will be just the man to travel with."

After dinner Roy retreated to his den, but Mary Gaskell sat down at her desk, unlocked a drawer, and took out her pass-book. Her balance at the bank was not what it should have been; she made a few calculations, smiled, and taking her cheque-book, wrote out a cheque.

She blotted it carefully, looked at it with a half humorous tenderness, and then went upstairs. She knocked at Roy's door.

"May I come in, dear?"

"Yes."

He was sitting smoking in the club chair she had bought him, but he did not get up.

"What is it, mater?"

"Just a little something, Roy, that may be useful, a help towards Switzerland."

She held out the cheque. He flushed angrily, but did not stretch out a hand.

"No—thanks, mater—I can't take it."

"But—my dear—I want you to take it."

"I tell you I won't. It's good of you; I can manage all right."

She winced, and stood there doubtfully, still holding the piece of paper towards him.

"Take it to please me, Roy."

"Mater, I tell you I can't. It's a question of pride. I have taken enough of your money."

She gave him a reproachful look, and turned towards the door.

"I'm sorry, dear. What is mine—is yours, you know. I did not think that such a thing as pride would ever come between us."

She loitered, but he had nothing to say; he was relighting his pipe. The once-offering had been refused. Mary Gaskell was grievously hurt.

She left him, but she did not destroy that cheque. She locked it away as a sort of memento, a pathetic thing to be treasured. Roy was in a rage.

"Prize-money for being a good boy, I suppose! I wonder if she knows? I shall be glad to get away from women."

And he pitied himself, so hard as yet was the shell of his young egoism. Humiliation was to bite deep into him, but he did not foresee the future, when he would lie wounded and broken, at the mercy of his mother's hands.

In three days he was off to Dover with Tom Richardson, and those three days had seen him in a mood of isolation and reserve. Such reserve, full of an imagined, Byronic dignity! His mother knew what had happened; she was waiting for him to speak, but that confession was never made. She did not force it, did not importune him with a woman's affection. She was wise in her restraint, though how deeply his silence hurt her Roy Gaskell never knew.

He kissed her perfunctorily, even with a suggestion of self compulsion.

"Good-bye, mater."

"Good-bye, dear. Enjoy yourself, and send me a card."

"Yes."

He escaped, still the young man on his dignity, unlicked by experience.

* * * * *

Richardson and Roy Gaskell were still in Switzerland when War spread like a huge thunderstorm over Europe. It came—sinister and undreamt of, filling the blue of the summer sky, sending a shock of dread and amazement through the hearts of those who had come to look upon war as a mischance to be ignored.

Who will ever forget that amazing week, that madman's week, when the soul of a great people pledged itself to infamy and dishonour? England, with its thoughts turned towards sea beaches and summer fields, thrilled with a strange awe, a listening solemnity. Her eyes gazed of a sudden upon the face of Destiny. Those were epic days.

War! Mary Gaskell could hardly credit it. The whole thing seemed like a sudden madness that must pass, a titanic jest, a mere pageant of words writ large on the posters. Surely it was impossible that war could come! She was thinking of Roy out yonder in Switzerland. She was afraid, greatly afraid, and yet she could not convince herself that the tragedy was real.

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Each morning she opened the paper with trembling hands. The shock came to her at last. England had taken up the gage; there was to be war, war for the sake of a nation's honour.

Mary Gaskell was still staring at those printed lines that kept blurring themselves before her eyes when Gwen Richardson burst in on her. She had not stood upon formalities; one forgot to ring front-door bells on such occasions.

She gave one glance at Mary Gaskell's pale face. Roy's mother looked ten years older.

"Have you heard?"

Mary Gaskell showed her the paper.

"Yes—I know. I mean from Roy?"

"No."

"I have had a card from Tom. They have started home. People are rushing back in crowds; it seems to be a frightful scramble; one cannot get into the trains. But they will be back in a day or two."

She sat down by the open window, vividly aware of what must be passing through Mary Gaskell's mind. To many such women Fate had brought a black hour of anguish, doubt, suspense. She was not one of those whose thoughts flew to her money in the bank. The call was on her own flesh and blood, on the very life for which she lived.

She folded up the paper and laid it aside on the table.

"Somehow—dear—I never realised that this would happen. Of course—his regiment is in India; he may not be called upon, but I am trying not to be selfish. He is a soldier. I made him a soldier—as his father had wished. The rest lies with God."

Gwen went across and kissed her.

"You dear—How brave you are!"

"No, I am not brave; I am a woman. We women, dear, are still so much at the mercy of men. They make war and we have to give them our sons; they rush away like boys, cheering, and we have to smother our tears and pretend that it is glorious. It isn't, dear; it's horrible. Ask all mothers. But we have to live up to our men, as things are at present. I shall not let Roy think me a coward."

Gwen had nothing to say, so she kissed her, and let her emotion vent itself against the Germans.

"Those treacherous beasts! They have

broken a solemn promise. No sense of honour! They will have to pay."

Two days passed, and late one afternoon Gwen Richardson received a telegram. It came from Dover, and had been sent by Tom:

"Just landed. R. persists in going straight to Aldershot. Sent Mary wire. Go and see her.—RICHARDSON."

Gwen put on her hat and went. She was furious with Roy. As if that impatient patriotism of his could not have spared his mother a few hours!

Mary Gaskell had had her telegram. She showed it to Gwen with a struggling smile. It was laconic, and sounded heartless in its haste:

"Going straight to Aldershot. Home battalion there. May get taken on.—GASKELL."

Mary Gaskell still had that thin smile on her face when Gwen looked at her.

"Isn't he brave? So keen!"

Gwen had to smother a lump in her throat.

"Oh, brave enough! That's not so difficult. But I think he might have come here first."

But Mary Gaskell stood by her boy.

"No; I am glad he has acted like that. I'm proud of it. If I have to give I will give generously."

She waited two more days in a silent horror of suspense. Then Roy's letter came:

"DEAR MOTHER,

"I have had a piece of luck. One of the fellows attached to the home battalion is laid up. They have given me his place. I shall be back for one night—next Tuesday. Tremendously busy. Can't tell you much; in fact, we hardly know anything. Shall you be able to let me have a little money? I will pay it back later. Please send my service things on at once."

"We are going to give those Germans something.—Yours affectionately,

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"He dropped the wounded man and put his hands up over his face"

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all manner of memories, that drawer. It would hold all the past if Fate took her son away from her.

Roy sent her no message as to when she might expect him on the Tuesday. She could hardly sleep all Monday night, being haunted by the idea that he might not be able to get leave. She rose early, and potted about in the garden all the morning, compelling herself to do things that seemed trivial, and even ridiculous. Why should one trouble about weeds when men were going out to be killed? Did it matter to her seriously whether her roses gave her a few flowers late in the autumn? Who cared?

She grew very restless as the day passed. She knew the time-table by heart, the exact minute at which the trains arrived. She had decided not to go to the station.

Tea-time came. The 3.45 had been in more than half an hour. She had tea all alone, sitting in the bay window of the drawing-room so that she could watch the gate. She began to be very depressed, full of forebodings, conscious of a yearning that dreaded lest it should be cheated.

Then a taxi stopped outside the gate. She jumped up, her heart beating so that it gave her pain. He had come.

She ran out to meet him. He kissed her with a kind of youthful condescension, magnanimously, yet with the air of being absorbed in other matters. It was obvious that he took the war and himself with great pomp and ceremony. In fact, he was in fine spirits, like a self-important boy off on an adventurous holiday.

"Only just managed to get leave. We are off soon. I like the Colonel; he's smart, and very decent. Yes, I should say it would last three months."

Once more she was to be disappointed. She had hoped that this crisis would give her back the child of her own heart, that they would spend those few solemn hours together talking like dear friends. She had hoped that he would confess to her, tell her about that broken engagement. But she found him reserved, absorbed in the war business, unable to talk of anything but the Germans and what the English infantry would do to them. She saw that he did not realise that she was suffering, that it was not

a great game to her, but a tragedy and a horror.

"I say, mater, can you get hold of some sovereigns? We have got to take English gold with us."

She promised to go to the bank directly it opened next morning.

"I am sure they will let me have gold—for you."

"Oh, we'll commandeer it. We soldiers are the big dogs now."

No doubt it was difficult for a young man who was going to the front to sit still and talk to an elderly woman, even though that woman happened to be his mother. Roy appeared to find it so, for he rushed off after dinner to get an evening paper and to have a talk with Tom Richardson.

"I shan't be long, mater."

But he did not return till half-past ten, nor did it occur to him that his mother might have been justified in feeling hurt. Mary Gaskell had learnt much in the last three months, and it was to her credit that this knowledge had not embittered her.

Roy talked to her for half an hour. Then he began to yawn with the healthy helplessness of the young male.

"I think I'll be turning in. I was up at five."

He slept like a child, but Mary Gaskell lay awake all night.

Those last few hours seemed to race, and she clung to them with a feeling of anguish and despair. Roy had to leave by the twelve o'clock train. He went with her to the bank, where they managed to give her gold. Then they strolled into the park, for Roy had no desire for the sea front and the chance of a meeting with Bertha Durrant. For the first time he seemed to realise that he was leaving his mother, that she might be worried about it, that she might be wondering whether she would ever see him again.

A sudden awkwardness possessed him. He was overtaken by self-consciousness. He glanced at his mother's face, and some far away, childish memory seemed to stir in him. Supposing he should never see her again. His buoyant egotism crumbled perceptibly.

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"I'll send you a line when I can, mater. You must not worry. I shall come through all right."

Her lips quivered. There was a tremor in his voice.

"I shall pray for you, dear."

And suddenly some outer husk seemed to fall away. He discovered that there were all sorts of things he wanted to say to her, but for the life of him he could not say them. He was inarticulate. For months he had treated his mother as a stranger, and all that habit of reserve clogged his emotions and stifled his desire for self-expression.

"You have been awfully good to me, mater."

Then he made the discovery that tears had rushed to her eyes. He was non-plussed, surprised, rendered more awkward and self-conscious. He glanced at his watch.

"We ought to be turning back."

"Yes, dear."

"You will come to the station with me?"

"Yes, I will come."

An hour later Roy found himself sitting beside her in a taxi. She was very pale, but her eyes were dry. A sudden sense of loneliness and of vague dread seized him. He could not find words to express himself, but he put out a hand half shyly and held one of hers.

She shuddered with emotion, but managed to keep calm.

"I know you will be very brave, dear. I shall be thinking of you every hour of the day."

A lump rose in his throat.

"I shall come back all right, mater. I'm not worrying about that."

She was very calm at the station, very quiet, but her eyes betrayed her. They watched him with a hungry and protective look. For a moment her slight, sensitive face expressed a primitive, female fierceness; he was being taken away from her, and her instincts rose in revolt.

She pressed her hands together, trying to smile, make herself talk of trivial things.

"If you should want more money, dear, do let me know. Be sure and take some good thick socks with you. Wouldn't some meat tabloids be useful?"

"They might. Hallo, here's the train."

He bailed it with relief, for his mother's eyes were beginning to unnerve him.

"Good-bye, mater. Don't wait; it makes it harder."

His arms went round her, and she clung to him for a moment.

"Oh, my dear. God bless you. You'll come back to me—I know."

She choked, and fought back her tears.

"I think I'll go. I won't wait, dear. Good-bye."

She kissed him, and his boy's mouth kissed her in return with sudden passion.

Then he pushed her gently away.

"Please go, mater. Yes, I'll write—whenever I can."

Her white face seemed to drift away from him, becoming a blur of yearning and of pain. He watched her walk quickly down the platform; at the main entrance she turned and waved.

He waved back. The next moment she had disappeared, and of a sudden he felt most horribly lonely.

Doors were slamming. He climbed into an empty carriage, sat down heavily in a corner seat, and stared hard at one of the coloured photographs above the seat opposite him.

"Oh—danin!"

He was conscious of a fierce desire to jump out of the carriage and run after that slight and lonely little figure that had vanished behind the brick walls of Sandbourne station. Then a fat man blundered in, breathing hard, and dragging a bag, which bumped against Roy Gaskell's knees. Why could not that fat fool have tumbled in elsewhere and left him alone!

* * * * *

For Mary Gaskell life became a solemn ante-chamber to the shrine of Fate—a chamber where she sat in silence, waiting, praying, a suppliant before the feet of Fate's priestess Suspense. She was but one woman among thousands, women who had given sons, husbands and fathers, but no woman in the kingdom had ventured a greater love than hers.

The nights were full of a horror of wakefulness. Then she would fall asleep, and open her eyes to see the summer

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sun shining. For a moment she was her normal self; then the truth forced itself upon her consciousness, and she would lie there trying to realise that England was at war. It seemed incredible, a monstrous and even preposterous nightmare. She began to hate Germany with a bitter and instinctive hatred.

The days drew on. She received two post cards from Roy. He was well and in fine spirits. The cards came from France, but he could give her no names. They were like messages from another world, a world of silence and mystery. They made her feel that she could not reach him, that he had been snatched away from her, that she was helpless, no longer a mother.

As for the daily papers, she both dreaded them and hated them for their reticence. It was so difficult to be patient when one was risking so much. The silence was like the oppressive stillness before the breaking of a storm. She began to wonder how much longer she would have to bear it.

Gwen Richardson spent hours with her every day, and Tom would call for her in the afternoons and take her with him in his car.

Gwen was splendid. She brought wool and patterns, and persuaded those patient hands to be busy about something. She kept up a quiet cheerfulness; her sympathy had a healthy reticence; she could be silent, and yet express herself eloquently by very means of this same silence.

She pretended to be proud of Roy, and her pride would bring a flash of pleasure to Mary Gaskell's eyes.

"Tom says he was splendid. His one idea was to rush back and take his place in the fighting-line. It makes one exult to think how brave our men are."

Gwen tried to persuade herself that Roy would come back, but her sincerity hampered her when she tried to assure Mary Gaskell that her son would return to her. Who could be sure, who could speak confidently when Death stood there with veiled face?

* * * * *

Over in France Roy Gaskell had recovered all the exuberance of youth. He was a little over-excited, perhaps, a little too talkative; but he was out on a

great adventure, and France had opened her arms to the men in khaki. He walked about the streets of Boulogne, dined at one of the hotels with the other youngsters of his regiment, and felt gloriously exhilarated and ready for spectacular heroism. None of these youngsters had ever seen a man die, or marched till their feet were bloody and their brains clogged with sleep.

The pale face of his mother grew less vivid and less real. The pathos of that parting with her was overlaid and hidden by multitudinous happenings that obscured more subtle memories. This was a man's game, enthralling, full of stirring realities. That little villa at Sandbourne was not absolutely forgotten, but it was like a boy's book put away in a corner of a bookshelf and ignored.

Then came Mons, and the chaotic heroism of that great retreat. Roy Gaskell escaped untouched in body, but not untouched in soul. He had seen men shot; he had seen men and horses mangled horribly; he had had the fear of death in him; he had marched till his feet were blood-glued to his boots. It was not demoralisation, but a stupor of weariness and disgust that weighed on many a man during that savage retreat towards Paris.

At length a night came when the word went round that the rear guards were not being pressed, that the men might sleep. Roy found himself in a rough outhouse with three other officers. Two of them were already asleep on some straw. The third, a captain, with a bristling chin and a gaunt, set face, was scribbling a letter, using a sheet torn from a pocket-book.

A candle-end was burning on the top of a tin. Roy Gaskell sat and stared at it with dull, expressionless eyes. He was unshaven; his face was a greyish brown, strangely old, and shrunken. And as he stared at the candle-flame he munched a stick of chocolate, his jaws moving mechanically as though he found no pleasure in eating.

Captain Blount glanced at him, and his eyes grew intent. He watched Roy Gaskell in silence for some seconds, and Roy Gaskell seemed utterly unaware of the fact that he was being watched.

"Hallo! Feel done?"

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"Hallo! Feel done?"

Roy started. A vague smile spread over his face.

"Lie down, and get some sleep."

"Can't sleep."

Blount looked at him keenly.

"Something on your brain? You looked as though you had been reading Bergson, and were trying to think it out."

"I wasn't thinking. I was just feeling things—and yet not feeling them. Like being given gas, and coming round while the chap's still at work on your tooth."

Blount got up.

"Look here, Gaskell, go and lie down on that straw. Superior orders. Sleep, man, sleep. No nonsense."

Roy did not move. He was on the edge of a nervous collapse, and Blount guessed it.

"Oh—very well then."

He was a phenomenally strong man, and he picked Roy up, carried him over to a pile of straw in a corner, and laid him down there like a baby. Roy did not resist. Exhaustion and nerve strain had brought him to a state bordering on catalepsy. He was just clay, ready to be shaped by a stronger will.

Captain Blount blew out the candle, and groped his way back to the straw where Roy was lying. He stretched himself beside the younger man, and, reaching out, fixed a grip on Roy's arm.

"You have done very well, boy; I don't want you to crock up. Sleep. You'll feel fit again in the morning."

He maintained his grip on Roy's arm, and some soothing, strengthening stimulus seemed to flow from him into Gaskell's exhausted body. His breathing grew deep and regular, and presently he fell asleep.

Mary Gaskell's son passed through all the psychological experiences of war. In three days Blount was dead, shot through the heart in the moment of victory. For victory had come at last; the faces of the English were turned no longer towards the west; the whole army was transfigured; the spirit of dogged and savage struggling against odds had given place to the smiling devilry of the attack.

Roy himself was changed. Blount's death had hit him hard for the moment, but no gloom could withstand the exultation of an advance. It was a glorious game of thrusting grimly at an enemy in

full retreat. Men shook off their weariness as if by magic. Chafed feet were forgotten. Prisoners and trophies were coming in.

There was yet another phase to be passed through, the most significant and subtle of them all.

It was the Battle of the Aisne. Both armies had dug themselves in. Attack and counter-attack oscillated to and fro with murderous persistency. The shell fire was indescribable. Not a man could be spared; not a man could rest. Each trench was like a steel wire under strain, taut, vibrating somewhat when the pressure waxed.

Dawn was about to break. Roy Gaskell stood leaning against the front wall of a trench, peering through a rough embrasure made of sods and the boughs of trees. The figures of men dwindled away on either side of him into the gloom, figures that squatted like Indians, or rested, half prone, with heads down on their arms. Not a word was spoken. The stillness was extraordinary. That trench might have been full of dead men waiting to be buried.

Roy Gaskell looked out over the dim landscape in front of him. It was grey and vague, and brooded over by an indefinable melancholy. Far away on the left a long wood trailed a blacker outline down into a valley. Yonder, straight ahead, in the far distance, something was burning. Shreds of white mist hung haphazard close to the ground. The field in front of the trench was dotted with cabbages.

Roy felt chilled. A shiver of awe went through him. A sudden inexplicable sadness seemed to drift out of that grey land. His brain felt extraordinarily clear and quick. A new sensitiveness was born in him, and he found his thoughts straying into a world of widening emotions.

What a contrast was all this to the life of a couple of months ago—that idle, sporting, careless life where a young man's chief need is to have money in his pocket! He thought of that affair with Bertha Durrant, and of his attitude towards his mother.

And suddenly he saw himself as he had never seen himself before. The grey light of that deathly dawn was part of a piece of grim enchantment. His other

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self stood out before him, the self of two months ago.

Heavens, what a beast he had been to his mother! He understood it all now. A hundred trivial incidents rushed back to haunt him—little things that he had passed over and failed to understand. It was as though Fate had been storing these memories against the day of his awakening when his manhood should discover itself and turn in disgust from the self-conceit of the crude boy.

What had he given his mother in return for all that she had given him? Nothing. He could hardly remember a single day when he had denied himself something on her account. He had made use of her, even felt aggrieved because she had not three thousand a year and an estate in the country.

For Roy Gaskell it was a moment of bitter self-knowledge, humiliation, and regret. Supposing he never went back to her, what sort of picture of himself had he left in her mind? She had forgiven him, no doubt, but he could not forgive himself as he stood facing the grey light of that September dawn.

From over yonder came the crack of a rifle, splitting the heavy silence with emphatic suddenness. Roy Gaskell's figure straightened. The whole trench stirred restlessly. Men peered out towards the dawn.

A sharp burst of firing came like a gust of wind before a storm. Then the grey distance quivered and roared with the abrupt thunder of guns. In an instant the whole temper of the dawn had changed. The stillness had gone from the grey landscape. Hell was let loose.

Shells came screaming overhead; the guns had not found the exact range. But every man in the trench knew what was to be expected. The Germans were making an attack in force, and their guns were covering the attack.

The rifle-fire over yonder crashed to a crescendo, and there was a sound of hoarse cheering. Roy Gaskell pulled his revolver from its holster, and stood peering through the embrasure. The clicking of rifle-bolts sounded along the trench; the men were very silent, staring out into the grey of the dawn.

The shells burst nearer. Then a crowd of scattered figures appeared racing back towards the cabbage field.

The outposts were falling back to rejoin the main body.

A figure that lagged behind tottered and fell. It rose again, struggled on a little way, and then crumpled up like a figure of straw struck with a pole. Roy Gaskell never remembered willing himself to do the thing he did, but he had scrambled out of the trench and was dashing across the field to where the wounded man lay.

He reached him in safety, got his hands under the man's armpits, and started to drag him back towards the trench. He was within ten yards of it when he heard his men shouting:

"Look out, sir! Look out!"

Roy had not noticed the screaming of that shell; he had been absorbed in dragging the wounded man back to cover. Nor had he time to realise his danger and to throw himself down before the shell burst.

Something struck him. He dropped the wounded man and put his hands up over his face. He was conscious of a kind of crushing pain forcing its way into his brain. His hands were all wet. He felt himself falling.

Two men scrambled out of the trench and carried him to cover. They laid him at the bottom of the trench, and their faces looked sharp and fierce.

"My Gawd, Bill, 'e's got it. Damn those Germans!"

* * * * *

Mary Gaskell found that letter waiting for her on the breakfast-table, the envelope bearing a French stamp, the address written in a hand that was strange to her. She sat for several seconds staring at the letter without stretching out a hand to touch it.

Then she picked it up, and slit open the envelope with the desperate haste of one eager to put an end to moments of unbearable suspense. Her hands trembled so violently that she could hardly read what was written:

"DEAR MADAM,—It is with great regret that I write to inform you that your son has been dangerously wounded. He has been the victim of his own gallantry, for he received his wound through leaving the shelter of a trench to go to the help of a wounded man.

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He has been sent to a base hospital, and I most sincerely hope that he will recover.

Please accept my expression of deep sympathy.—Believe me, madam, yours sincerely,

"HALLAM,

"Officer commanding Royal Wessex Regiment."

Mary Gaskell closed her eyes. The letter and the hands that held it sank into her lap. Her lips moved. She was praying.

Many days passed, days of helpless suspense, before further news reached Roy Gaskell's mother. It came through Tom Richardson, who had been worrying the War Office in person in an obstinate attempt to find out something definite. He returned from town by an evening train, looking grave and absorbed. He brought the news that Roy was alive, that he was expected, with a batch of wounded, at Folkestone, the very next day.

He sent Gwen to Mary Gaskell, advising her that the mother was not told the whole truth. Roy was alive, but he was nearly blind.

Gwen Richardson never forgot the look on Mary Gaskell's face when she heard that not only was Roy alive but that he was coming home.

"Oh, my dear, I can hardly believe it. Did Tom find out where he had been wounded?"

"Yes."

Mary Gaskell waited, her eyes watching Gwen's face.

"He was wounded in the head, very severely."

Mary Gaskell remained silent for several seconds.

"Is he disabled, dear?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"Then he won't be able to go back to the front?"

"No."

Mary Gaskell's pale face flushed.

"Oh, what a selfish coward I am! I can't help feeling glad, dear—exultant. The war can't take him away from me again. And, after all, I sent him without a murmur."

Gwen was suffering poignant distress. She felt that the mother ought to know

that Roy's sight was ruined, in spite of Tom's warning that she should be allowed to discover it for herself. Yet Gwen had great faith in Tom's human wisdom. It was possible that he counted upon the mother's pity carrying her above the shock and giving her a strength that would save her from disastrous grieving.

"Tom is going to meet Roy at Folkestone. He will bring him home."

"Perhaps it is better that a doctor should go; Tom has been so kind."

It was growing dusk next day when Tom Richardson walked out of Sandbourne station, holding Roy Gaskell's arm. He had to guide him down the steps and across the pavement to his car. A big shade covered Roy's eyes. He was less disfigured than Richardson had feared.

"Step up. That's it. Mrs. Gaskell's, Wilson."

The car moved off through the dusk, the sad twilight of an October evening. Roy sat absolutely still, his hands clasped, his head bowed forward. He had spoken hardly a dozen words on the journey from Folkestone. He seemed possessed by a tragic apathy; he just sat there mutely, crushed, in a daze.

Richardson left him in peace. He felt inarticulate. This was a woman's affair, and a woman's touch was needed.

The car stopped outside the gate of the villa. Tom helped Roy out and across the path. Then he saw someone hurrying through the front garden, and being wise in his generation, he left Roy to his mother and fled.

Mary Gaskell pulled the gate open and caught her son's hands.

"Oh, my dear—you have come back! Thank God! And you have been so brave!"

The dusk had softened the scars on his face, but that shade was significant.

"Your poor eyes are weak! I'll lead you in."

Roy said never a word. He was like a man who did not grasp things, did not understand. He did not tell her that he was nearly blind. That tragic apathy seemed to weigh him down and to keep him crushed and voiceless.

He let her lead him up the path, but at the first step he stumbled.

"My dear! It is rather dark, and you

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can't see well with that shade. Two steps; you remember."

She led him in, and he felt her hands trembling with emotion.

"This way—into the drawing-room. I haven't had the lamps lit yet; I didn't expect you quite so soon. There's the sofa; sit down. I will go and get some matches."

He blundered against the sofa, and sat down heavily. Mary Gaskell had reached the hall when she heard a sound that brought her to a standstill.

It was the sound of weeping, the passionate, agonised weeping of a nervous child left alone in the dark. But it was a man who wept, and in a man such tears are terrible.

Mary Gaskell hurried back into the room, and in the dim light she could see Roy stretched along the sofa, his face hidden in the cushions. His whole body was shaking.

"My dear, what is it?"

He turned to her like a child.

"Mother—mother!"

She was on her knees, and he clung to her, pressing his face against her bosom. The shade had fallen off, but in the dim light she could not see his eyes.

"Mother—mother! I'm nearly blind!"

For a moment the blood seemed to falter and stiffen in her brain. She gasped; her arms were limp about him; horror prevailed. Then she reacted as Tom Richardson had prophesied. She was the mother clasping her stricken child, consumed by furious compassion, doubly strong in the uprising of her love.

"Oh, my dear—my boy! What have they done to you? The shame—the cruelty! And you were so brave! There—there, mother's here—mother's with you! Just cry your heart out, dear; put your arms round me. I understand."

She let him weep, feeling that Nature was wise in such matters, and that tears may save a man from desperate ends. And even her own anguish was pierced by a swift exultation as he clung to her—the mother.

Presently he gained some control of himself and was able to speak.

"I'm sorry, mother—to play the coward like this.. I held out all right—until I got home."

"It is not cowardice, dear."

"Somehow, I couldn't help it. You have been so awfully good to me, mother. I realised it all when I saw men dying over there, and felt what a selfish fool I had been."

She kissed his forehead.

"We will forget all that. Life has to teach us, dear. Wait! I will go and fetch the lamp, and then we shall not be disturbed."

He let her go, but when she returned with the lamp he held out his arms to her. The horror of the darkness was upon him.

"Mother—don't leave me!"

She flew to him with a cry of inarticulate tenderness. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, my child—my little son—for you are my 'little son' once more! You have come back to me; you are mine—all mine!"

He put up his hands and felt her face.

"I'm useless, mother. I shan't be able to earn a penny. It makes me feel savage to think that you will have to keep me."

"Don't—don't! But—oh, what a selfish wretch I am! My dear, all that is mine is yours. Don't you understand what it means to a mother?"

She sat beside his bed that night, for he was loath for her to leave him, and would not let go of her hand. And presently he fell into a deep sleep, his hand clasping hers like the hand of a child.

There was a tremor of exultation in her heart, like the cry of a bird in the greyness of a sad dawn. Her boy had come back to her.

* * * *

A week later Tom Richardson came back to lunch, and Gwen met him.

"Well?" she queried.

"Better than I thought. McGavin saw him this morning, and was quite hopeful. Of course, his sight will never be anything very great."

"But he will see?"

"Oh, quite decently."

Gwen turned away to hide her eyes.

"Mary's glad?"

"In heaven! I think she wanted to kiss me!"

"You dear old idiot! Why didn't you?"

"Perhaps I did!"

20 June 1914

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THE DERBY DAILY TELEGRAPH, SATURDAY, JULY

PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

BY

WARWICK DEEPING.

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Jimmy gave a sudden spring, caught Fitzhaddon and had him neatly out of the saddle. There was a short and vigorous scuffle. The girl had the little car gently on the move. She edged past the horse, with a glimpse of Jimmy urging Fitzhaddon in the direction of the ditch.

There was a burst of vituperation, a scrambling sound, and a slushing splash of a body into muddy water.

"Quick, Jimmy," said the girl.

He sprang back to the car and climbed in as it was moving.

Jimmy Burrell found himself stranded about six o'clock at Crestwick station. A solitary porter under a fluttering gas lamp could suggest nothing in the way of a conveyance.

There was no village of Crestwick, and Jimmy Burrell had returned to the station for his suit case. He asked the solitary porter how far it was to Rusthill Court.

"A matter of three miles, sir."

"Oh—well, I'll walk. There must have been some mistake, though; they were to meet me here with the car."

Jimmy Burrell picked up his suit-case, and tramped, leaving hat-box and golf bag in the hands of the porter.

"Just six," he said to himself; "I shall be up there in time to change. Wonder where Earnshaw's wife are? The first baby, and a new house! He ought to have got over them by this time."

Jimmy Burrell trudged along, changing the

"About twenty minutes. He'll be riding."

"Lord, we haven't much time left."

He proceeded to insinuate himself under the car. The girl seemed to feel the pathos of it.

"I say—it seems a beastly shame making you mess about down there."

"Oh, it's all right," said Jimmy, feeling particularly noble on account of the mud.

There was a good deal of heavy breathing and grunting, and an occasional exclamation. Jimmy's legs seemed restless—an evidence of progress.

"Pass the wire—please."

Their fingers touched.

"That's it. Got it all right. Can you hear anything?"

She stood listening and looking into the darkness.

"No, not yet."

In due course Jimmy came squirming out, his back all mud and his cap on at an absurd angle. He looked workmanlike, though not heroic, with a smear of black grease across one cheek bone.

The girl laughed and turned the lamp on him.

"It's mean of me—but you do look funny."

"Thank you," said Jim, "so did you when you were winding at the handle."

Jimmy had the carburettor screwed up, and was putting the floor boards back, when the girl turned and stood listening.

"He's coming!" she said.

"Sharp's the word—then. Turn on the petrol—and screw that lamp on."

They hustled about eagerly as a faint clatter of hoofs came out of the darkness.

"Get in," said Jimmy, "I'll work the handle. Please God—she'll start."

The girl climbed in, and sat down behind the steering wheel with a delighted little laugh.

"I say—isn't it fine? Reminds one of Drury Lane."

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Jimmy Burrell trudged along, changing the suit case from hand to hand, and wishing the things were not so confoundedly heavy. It was a cloudy night, with not a star showing. He had covered about a mile, and was growing heartily sick of the suit case, when he turned his head sharply to listen. A faint yet cherry "chug—chug—chug" came up on the wind behind him. Jimmy faced round, to see two great yellow eyes shining out of the distant darkness. It occurred to him suddenly that it was Earnshaw's car that had run down to the station by another road, missed him through being late, and was now overtaking him upon the heath.

Jimmy put his suit-case down at the side of the road, and waited. The two yellow eyes came up the hill with the rapid "chug—chug" of a single cylinder car running on second gear. He knew a good deal about motors.

Jimmy watched the lights come nearer.

"Hallo—what's up now?"

The cheerful hum of the engine had broken suddenly into the irregular and spasmodic chatter of a series of "mistfires." The little car spat, and faltered. Then silence descended.

He picked up his suit-case, and walked the twenty yards down the road, to see a dim figure labouring at the crank handle. Nothing seemed to come of it save a very eminent betrayal of temper.

"Bother the little beast!"

The voice was a woman's, and Jimmy, who had a sentimental side to him, immediately felt very interested and sympathetic, though he could see little for the moment but the two lights and a dim figure standing by the motor.

Jimmy came up, and put his suit-case down in the road.

"Excuse me—can I be of any use?"

The figure turned sharply, and Jimmy was able to gauge the amount of interest the adventure might promise. A girl in a white motor cap and a long green coat stood in the light of the lamps. And Jimmy had a conviction that she was comely.

Drury Lane."

"Oh, does it!" said Jimmy, a little grimly, stooping for the crank handle.

The clatter of hoofs came very near. Jimmy gave a turn to the crank without success. At the third puff, however, there was the welcome explosion in the cylinder. The engine began to throb joyously. Jimmy swung round and climbed into the car.

"Bother it," said she.

"Won't the gears mesh? He's quite close."

"That's it!"

The clutch went in rather roughly, and the car went off with a bump.

"Push her along."

"All very fine, but we've got the hill against us."

Jimmy was looking back into the darkness.

"Here he comes, by George!"

The girl got into the second speed, and pushed the throttle lever forward till the lamps rattled.

"Will she go on top speed?"

"I'll try."

"He'll catch us, unless you can."

A mounted man came cantering out of the darkness. Jimmy eyed him, and began to slip off his overcoat.

"Confound the little beast," said the girl, "she's knocking. It's no go."

A shout came from behind them. The horse ranged up.

"Thought I'd catch your footling pram! Pull up, Betty."

"Idiot! Shan't!" said the girl.

"Who's that there? Cave in. It's no use."

"Oh, isn't it!" came the echo.

"Try the hooter," said Jimmy.

She tried it, but without effect. The man on horseback forged ahead, drew clear by thirty yards, and then put his horse across the road.

The girl pulled up with an impatient exclamation.

"Get out, Jimmy," she said.

Jimmy got out.

"Go for him. Rag him off."

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"Oh—thanks. I don't know what the little wretch is sticking for."

She looked Jimmy over intently, and was able to judge him even in the half light by the subtle significance of clothes. She also noticed the brown suit case that he had deposited on the road.

Jimmy began to explain, but the girl seemed in too great a hurry to tolerate explanations.

"You had better put your kit on the luggage platform. It's a bit thick down there. Awfully maddening being let down like this!" She unfastened the bonnet clips, raised it, and unhooked a lamp. Jimmy gave a glance at the car.

"Six horse Wanderer; sound stuff. I know something about—them."

The girl was fiddling with the wires, and biting her lower lip irritably. Jimmy insinuated his head beside hers under the bonnet.

"Accumulators charged?"

"Last week."

"No short circuit? Are you in a hurry?"

"A confounded hurry," she said, showing a certain slangy forgetfulness that was rather to Jimmy's taste. He liked a girl with a temper. She kept a man from being amiably bored.

"Going far?"

"Two miles."

The distance seemed ludicrously short of her impatience. Jimmy stole a glance at her as he investigated wires and plug.

"Get her ready in ten minutes, and I'll be awfully grateful."

"Well—I'll try."

He began to notice that the girl seemed to be listening for some sound over the heath. She stood staring down the road in the direction of Crestwick. The whole affair began to puzzle Jimmy a little, but there was no displeasure about being puzzled.

He set the throttle lever, flooded the carburettor, and took a few turns at the handle before switching on.

"Good mixture—now," he said, turning on the switch, "let's see if she'll go."

But there was no explosion in the car.

Fitzhudson edged his horse down the road, and Jimmy walked towards him casually, yet not unmindful of the hypothetical pistol.

"Hallo, sir," he said, "what's wrong?"

"Wrong? Who the deuce are you?"

"Betty picked me up at Crestwick Station"—the Betty came out pat—"I'm due at Rasthill. Clear, please, will you?"

"Blessed if I shall."

Jimmy gave a sudden spring, caught Fitzhudson and had him neatly out of the saddle. The horse, mildly surprised, walked sedately on to the grass as though scorning a share in any such vulgar rag.

There was a short and vigorous scuffle. The girl had the little car gently on the move. She edged past the horse, with a glimpse of Jimmy urging Fitzhudson in the direction of the ditch.

There was a burst of vituperation, a scrambling sound, and a slushing splash of a body into muddy water.

"Quick, Jimmy," said the girl.

He sprang back to the car, and climbed in as it was moving.

"Splendid, ripping!" said she, "we're close to the brow. It's down hill then. We can simply boost."

Jimmy was a little out of breath.

"It's all right," he said, looking back, "he isn't out yet. And I don't think he'll hurry."

The girl laughed joyously. She pulled the lever into the top-speed, and the little car began to whirl downhill. The fresh night wind whistled into their faces.

"I say, what about the pistol?" he asked.

"Goose," said she, "there wasn't one. That was all bunkum. A pretty flight of the imagination."

"Jimmy looked at her doubtfully.

"But I say! It's all right, isn't it? He did—"

"Oh, yes, that's all right. This would have been the eighth, and I'm tired."

Jimmy grew thoughtful.

"Which eighth?" he asked at last, "does the number refer to the man or the—you know what?"

"Why, what does it matter?"

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But there was no explosive life in the car, and no welcome "chug-chug." Jimmy put his cap back, and wound valourously, all to no purpose.

"She plugged—I believe," he said: "let's have a look at the carburettor. Got any tools with you?"

"Yes. They are in the box."

She brought the lamp, and Jimmy raked about in the tool box for a screw driver and a pair of pliers.

"You seem in a hurry," he said tentatively.

"So would you be," she retorted. "if you had a mad ass chasing you with a pistol in his pocket."

"Oh!" said Jimmy vaguely. "got any fine wire?"

She rummaged about in the tool box.

"Yes, somewhere."

"What's the chase about?" he asked. "if I may know."

"I don't know why you should."

"Nor do I," said Jimmy. "unless you happen to be going to Earnshaw's place."

She stared at him.

"He's my brother-in-law. Are you going to Rusthill?"

"Well, I was ten minutes ago. That for

"Steady a little I say! You've no acetylene. There might be a ninth, you know. It's possible."

"Oh, is it?" she retorted. "Well, mind you be careful."

The motor ran up the drive to Rusthill Court with a crunching and scattering of shingle. The front door was open under the big porch, and a little man in shooting jacket and knickers was standing under the lamp.

"Hallo, Betty, where the dickens have you been? Mab's been quite worried. And who's this? Why, Jimmy, I thought—"

The girl laughed, and blew the horn uproariously.

"The best piece of fun I've had for a long time, Ben," she said. "Fitzhodson's had his eighth shot, and Jimmy wiped his eye."

The little man looked humorously solemn.

"Jimmy, what have you been doing?" he said. "we didn't expect you till seven."

"Oh, nothing," said James modestly. "I only started to walk."

(The End.)

MORE STORM FATALITIES.

CHILD STRUCK DEAD AT MOTHER'S FEET.

to Rushhill?"

"Well, I was ten minutes ago. They forgot to meet me at Crestwick, and I thought I'd walk."

The girl seemed to clutch at an inspiration.

"Then—you're Jimmy Burrell?"

"Well—yes—I ought to be."

"Grand!" she said. "You are just the man I want."

"Eternally proud," said he. "but why? And what about that wire?"

She rummaged still further amid spanners, a pump, lifting jack, rags, and other accessories all tumbled up together.

"Here it is. You were middle-weight champion up at Cambridge?"

Jimmy looked at her curiously.

"Well?" said he.

"You can punch Fitzhodsens head if he catches us. That's all!"

Jimmy looked amused, but meditative. The "us" piqued him.

"Oh—that's all—is it?" he said. "I thought you said something about a pistol."

"So I did. Fitzhodsens quite a lunny. He's proposed to me seven times in a month."

"My word!" said Jimmy, "that settles it."

"Don't be rude. I want to be rid of the fool."

"But what about that pistol? Idiots who—"

"Oh, I don't suppose he'd shoot you, you know. But he goes daft when he's excited."

"I see," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "seems to me I had better get at that jet."

Floor boards were removed, and the carburettor top unscrewed. Then he took off the brake, pushed the car back a yard or two, and felt the road rather dubiously with his feet.

"I know these Wanderers," he said: "had one two years ago—for golf. To get at the jet one has to unscrew a nut—right in under there. I shall have to grovel. By the way, how much start had you?"

CHILD STRUCK DEAD AT MOTHER'S FEET.

There were severe thunderstorms in many parts of the country on Friday, and two persons were struck dead, while damage to property was caused by lightning and floods.

In North Nottinghamshire the storm was very severe on Friday night, and a labouring man named George Maddison, whilst crossing a field on his way home from work at Houghton, near Retford, on the Duke of Newcastle's estate, was killed by lightning. He was accompanied by his little daughter, who escaped injury. Several stacks in the neighbourhood were set alight.

At West Thurrock, Essex, during a very severe thunderstorm, which visited Grays, Tilbury, and the riverside parishes, Mary Ann Emily Day (4), daughter of James Thomas Day, a labourer, of Thurrock, was walking along a footpath when she was struck dead at her mother's feet, being terribly burned.

At Tilbury the Roman Catholic Church was damaged by a flash of lightning, and some of the ships in the docks were also struck. Much flooding was caused in the lower part of Tilbury by the heavy rain, and the lower parts of many of the houses were full of water.

At Mortlake a flash of lightning struck a horse and van. The horse was killed instantly, and the driver, a Wandsworth man named Stephen Search, was removed to Richmond Infirmary.

Business Announcements.

YET ANOTHER COMPLETE CURE.

Mrs. Thornton, of 79, Brighton-street, Salford, Manchester, writes that Clarke's Blood Mixture has completely cured her daughter of severe Eczema, her body at one time being "without healthy skin from head to foot." Clarke's Blood Mixture, owing to its remarkable blood purifying properties, can be relied upon to effect lasting cures in all cases of Eczema, Scrofula, Scurvy, Bad Legs, Abscesses, Boils, Pimples, Sores of all kinds, Blood Poison, Glandular Swellings, Rheumatism, and all Skin and Blood diseases. Pleasant to take, and guaranteed harmless to the most delicate. Over 50 years' success. Of all Chemists and Stores, 2s. 6d. per bottle.

Flogged Through the Fleet.

A Story of Love
and Treachery.By
WARWICK
DEEPING.

SYNOPSIS.

Thomas Iden and Stephen Venger are both in love with pretty Ruth Tempest, and Iden is to marry her within a month. Venger, with diabolical treachery, successfully evokes the help of a press gang to remove Iden from his path. After a time he asks Ruth to marry him, and is repulsed. He schemes for revenge, and by means of an anonymous letter causes Iden to desert. Iden is caught and subjected to the barbarous punishment of being flogged through the fleet.

"Why, that Tom Iden's turned sailor in more ways than one. That he never means to come back."

She showed no anger.

"Let them say what they please."

"But, Ruth, this can't go on for ever."

You will have to choose. I'm a man, and I love you; I want you."

"I shall never marry you, Stephen."

"Time will show. I am going on making love to you, Ruth, till my hair turns gray."

"I shall never marry you, Stephen."

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The Laced Yoke.



A short jumper, suitable for a young girl, with the new laced yoke

TEA-TIME GOSSIP.

Trying to Help: The Conductor's Ordeal.

In many tramcars a list of hints to passengers as to how to help the authorities to make the service more efficient has been posted up. But there is danger with the well-intentioned and literal minded.

For I saw an aged spinster read the instructions carefully and then lean forward and give the conductor a terrific jab in the back, saying: "Please put me down at the stopping place after next." The conductor had no words to fit the situation; the self-satisfied look on the woman's face was worth seeing.

Crawling Bottles.

The small wooden boxes fitted with a loose spring in which the ink for one's fountain pen is carried are now being used for other purposes. It is obviously just the very idea for the safe carriage of bottles containing liquids, such as hair wash or scent, when travelling, and one enterprising West-end firm is making a speciality of them for this purpose. Before long they will be beautifully inlaid or carved, no doubt.

Not Enough Crackers.

There are evidently going to be great "crackings" to-morrow, for many of the suburban shops have been sold out of crackers of every description for some days past. A weary South London mother told me that she had searched every local shop for a few crackers, and in despair had to make a special journey up to town for them.

The Dressing-case Trap.

You will travel a long way to find the man or woman who does not agree that dressing-cases are an intolerable nuisance, with their superfluous pots and unnecessary gear.

Who Gets Caught?

Fet there is never a time when the most elaborate and expensive specimens are not on sale, or some new trifle being added to attract the unsophisticated. Obviously they sell, but who buys these white elephants?

arm, and Thomas Iden's eyes were no longer unshaken.

"Ruth has her choice, Mr. Christopher, and she has chosen. God bless her. I'll make her a proud woman yet."

Arm in arm they passed out of the orchard and along the road to Forge Farm.

Old Tempest threw his ledger against the trunk of an apple tree.

"Well, I'm damned!" was all he said; that day, though her father made one more attempt to stop her.

"Come you in, you hussy."

But she had hold of Thomas Iden's

Recognition showed in his eyes, but there was no light of welcome in them.

"Good heavens, man, what's happened to you?"

"I tried to desert for Ruth's sake, and was flogged through the fleet. I'm a broken man. They die of it as a rule; I didn't."

Old Tempest looked at this wreck of a man, with his shrunken and crippled body and starved face. And whatever pity he may have felt was smothered by his ancestral worldliness, and by the thought of Stephen Venger, who wanted to marry Ruth.

"Sit down, Tom. You've made a mess of your life, I must say."

The pucker of pain on Iden's forehead grew more marked.

"I looked into the orchard, sir, and saw Ruth and Stephen Venger walking there together. You will tell me if he has taken my place."

Christopher Tempest watched him suspiciously.

"I reckon he has, Tom. And if you ask my advice, I'd bid you not try to make a show against Stephen Venger. You're not quite—"

But Thomas Iden broke in on him with a flash of solemn passion. His face glowed like the face of a fanatic.

"Christopher Tempest, they may have broken my body, but they have not broken my soul. You may be a careful man, sir, but I'm looking beyond your horizon. I'm going to set Ruth free of my own free will. We'll go to the orchard, you and I, Christopher Tempest."

Christopher Tempest's lips moved; it was as though he were calculating, adding up figures. He still held that ledger of his. He looked at Thomas Iden with broad, appraising eyes. The fellow was a scarecrow; his appearance should elicit matters.

"That's a sensible speech, Tom Iden. I don't see how a girl could take you—"

"Will you come, sir?"

"I will."

Ruth and Stephen Venger were still walking up and down when Christopher Tempest and Tom Iden appeared at the orchard gate. The place was all mottled with sunlight and shadow. Faces looked paler under the trees.

"Ruth, here's an old friend come back. He has something to say to you."

"I will."

Not one of them spoke for some moments. Ruth stood there, listless, while, to the lips, staring at the wreck of the man who was to have been her husband. Stephen Venger's face had clouded, but its expression suggested a mingling of insolence and triumphant pity.

He looked at Thomas Iden and saw in him a thing so arched and contemptible that he shared Christopher Tempest's belief that Ruth would be shocked to disgust.

It was Thomas Iden who spoke first. His face was set and haggard.

"Ruth, I've come back. I tried to come back before, but they caught me and made me what I am. I have something to say to you, before Stephen Venger and your father—"

She took a step forward, and her lips moved, but Thomas Iden signed to be silent.

"No, let me have my say. I'm a broken man, Ruth; I've come home, but I ask for no one to pity me. No, by God, I'll take no pity."

His face lit up and his eyes kindled.

"No. A year ago—I was to have married you. I break that bargain; a wreck like I am is no longer a man to ask such a thing as marriage. I ask you, Ruth, your father can be witness to it. And now—I'll be going—going home."

Ruth's Triumph.

He had turned to go, but Ruth Tempest called him back. He was so strangely soft and husky, as though she were on the verge of tears.

"Tom, I haven't answered you yet."

He hesitated, and then faced her. "I'm not playing for your pity, Ruth."

"Would it hurt—if I pitied you, Tom?"

"I am what I am; I've my pride left in my body's a bit of wreckage."

She went close to him, looking him in the eyes.

"Then you don't love me any longer, Tom?"

What his answer would have been Thomas Iden himself never knew, for Christopher Tempest had heard enough.

"No more of this stage stuff, Ruth. Tom's acted very properly. He has given you up."

She flashed round on her father, and for once in his life he discovered that she had a temper.

"But I haven't given Tom up; and what is more—I am not going to give him up. I'm of age, and I can do as I please. I'm going to marry the man I've chosen."

Tom said nothing, but old Tempest was as angry as his daughter.

"What, marry the scarecrow? Where are your wits and your pride, girl? And here's Stephen Venger here."

Stephen Venger was biting his lip and assessing. He managed to laugh, and not in the face, Mr. Tempest.

"I can't run against such a broken screw."

"Ruth, Tempest gave him one look."

"He wanted me, Tom; he tried to steal me away. Give me your arm, dear. I'll go with you to the farm."

It was Ruth who did what she pleased that day, though her father made one more attempt to stop her.

"Come you in, you hussy."

But she had hold of Thomas Iden's

Continued in Next Column.

THREE-DAY STORY.

FLOGGED THROUGH THE FLEET.

By
WARWICK DEEPING.

A STORY OF LOVE AND TREACHERY.

I—THE LOVERS.

A young man in a green coat, red waistcoat, buff breeches, and top boots came riding along the Happingstone-road into Redminster Town. The chestnut cob under him had been groomed to a triumphant glossiness. The young man had a rose in his button-hole. He looked brown and strong and excellently well pleased with life.

Half an hour ago Ruth Tempest had run down to the gate at the end of her father's orchard and given him the rose he wore in his coat.

"I should like the bed to be mahogany, Tom," and she had blushed.

"And what about a new steel grate for the parlour, sweetheart?"

"Yes, that old thing has half its bars broken. And I should like one or two china figures, Tom."

"You shall have them," he had said, patting his pocket and bending down to kiss her before he rode on.

Old Mother Honeyfoot, standing at the door of her sweetstuff and candy shop, saw Thomas Iden ride by, and winked at Mr. Danks, the cobbler across the way.

"There's a bit of proud flesh for ye, and God bless him. I could tell ye where he comes by that flower."

The cobbler grinned, and his spectacles twinkled.

"Next month, isn't it? He'll be dropping the guinea at Mr. Hassock's. Mirrors for her to see herself in, and chains curtains, and them new-fangled chairs with the spindle legs."

"Well, he's a fine, lusty fellow. Good luck to his blue eyes!"

Half-way up the High-street someone else looked up and saw Thomas Iden riding by. It was Stephen Vennar, of Vennar and Son, ship chandlers; he was sitting in the bay window of his father's dusty little office, making entries in a ledger. And an unpleasant glint came into Stephen Vennar's eyes. He frowned, bit his quill, and watched the man on the chestnut cob ride into the yard of the "King Harry."

Thomas Iden had disappeared into the coach yard when young Vennar became aware of a queer profile passing along outside the window within a yard of where he sat. It was the profile of an old man with a broken nose, and a protruding chin, from the end of which hung a little tuft of reddish hair. He was wearing a beaver that was much too large for him crammed down over his ears.

Stephen Vennar's face seemed to harden with sudden decision. He tapped on the window, and the old man with the red beard turned sharply. Their eyes met through the leaded panes.

Stephen Vennar beckoned, but his lips did not move. The old man passed on and turned into the shop. Stephen Vennar had got down off his stool; he opened the office door and found the old man standing there with the bland and leering look of one who had a very shrewd notion of why he was wanted in Stephen Vennar's office.

Redminster Town smelt of the sea, and Zachary Trig had lived all his life in Redminster Town. He kept a little beer shop down by the harbour, but his ways of making money were various, and complex. The Great War had served Zachary a good turn, if he had not passed on a like blessing to others.

Vennar perched himself on his stool. "Business brisk, Zachary?"

Trig squirted a stream of tobacco juice, and grinned.

"If it ain't this moment, 'twill be afore long."

"The Hawk is still lying off Shingle Point, isn't she?"

"She is, sir. She ain't filled her stomach yet."

Stephen Vennar leant forward and

looked straight into old Trig's eyes.

"You are their man, Zachary, eh?"

"Maybe I am."

"When is the gang coming ashore?"

"Trig screwed up his eyes, and scratched his head."

"Taint for us to let on."

"Fudge! I'm out for a bargain, and perhaps you can guess what I'm after?"

"Maybe I can, sir. Mr. Tom Iden's over at the 'King Harry.' He's come a-shopping; there's the farmer's supper on tonight; he's due to sleep at the 'King Harry,' for Bob Potts told me they were to make a night of it."

Vennar nodded his head.

"Fine, strapping fellows are wanted, Zachary, in these stirring times."

"That they be, sir."

"Supposing you brought the gang up to the 'King Harry'?"

Zachary Trig rubbed his nose.

"Well, I might—and I might not. I'm a soft-hearted lubber, Mr. Stephen."

The younger man's eyes glinted.

"All right. What's the price? Say, five guineas down; and another five guineas if they get Tom Iden on board. And there's that little bit of money you owe us; I'll say nothing about it so long as you keep your mouth shut."

Trig stared at the toe of his right boot.

"Call it a bargain, sir. I'll take them five guineas. Times be hard, and an old man must live."

Stephen Vennar seemed to have been prepared for some such bargain. He had the gold in his pocket, and the money changed hands.

He stole quietly to the door, opened it suddenly, and found that the shopmen were busy with some tackle in the store-room at the back of the shop. He beckoned to Zachary Trig.

"All right. I'll take a walk down by the battery to-morrow night. Zachary Trig slipped out."

And so it befell that the press gang from the Hawk raided Redminster that night, forced their way into the "King Harry," and caught Thomas Iden asleep in his bed. He made a fight for it, but the King's tars were not more gentle than the King's laws in those days, and Thomas Iden, with half a dozen more men caught in Redminster Town, was taken on board the frigate that lay off Shingle Point. The frigate set sail next day for Portsmouth, and Stephen Vennar sat at his desk and smiled.

It was the landlord of the "King Harry" who took the news up to King's Oak and Forge Farm. He mounted his nag early, and being a kind sort of man, he was puzzled how to lay his tongue to the telling of such a tale. He decided that he would break the news to Mr. Christopher Tempest, and let him tell it to his daughter, but chance and a woman's eagerness decided otherwise.

Ruth Tempest was expecting Thomas Iden to ride by on his way to Forge Farm, and she set herself at her bedroom window, sewing ribbon on to a lace cap. The morning was rather misty, and on seeing a heron-coming up the road past the great oast-house she ran down stairs and through the garden to the gate.

Press

Ganged.

"The landlord of the 'King Harry' was caught in an ambush. He had a very expressive face, and his embarrassment betrayed him."

"Why, Mr. Dobbs, is it you?"

"Bless me, you are about early, Miss Tempest. Is your father in the house?"

"No," and her eyes seemed to grow big. "And I don't think you have news for my father, Mr. Dobbs."

"Well—I have—and I haven't. Fact is—"

She opened the gates, went out, and stood by his horse, looking up at him.

"Tom Iden was with you last night. I mistook you for him—on the road. What is it, Mr. Dobbs; not bad news?"

He cleared his throat.

"Perhaps it would be kinder to tell you, Miss Tempest."

"Then for heaven's sake be quick."

Mr. Iden was taken by the press gang last night. He's on board the Hawk, and she's set sail for Portsmouth."

Ruth Tempest stared at him a moment, and then "fell flat in t' road," as he described it afterwards, for in those days people knew what being taken by the press gang meant.

Ruth Tempest was no vapourish fool. The Tempests of King's Oak were tough and solid people, wheelwrights, timber merchants, and farmers; a little of everything, prosperous, and in their way—proud. Ruth was like none of them so far as looks were concerned; she was a ship of a woman, with dark eyes and a pale face, and a mass of black hair that fell to her knees when she let it down at night. But she had all the doggedness of the Tempests, and a touch of fire that had come from a Huguenot grandmother.

Mr. Dobbs had dismounted in a hurry and people had come running from the house, but in three minutes Ruth was on her own feet, quite calm, and wholly mistress of herself.

"I am going up to Forge Farm," she told them, "with Joan Iden so frail—the news must be let in softly."

She walked up all alone to Forge Farm, strangely calm, though a lump kept coming into her throat. From the high ground she could see the sea, blue beyond the green hills, with the white sails of ships mimicking the white

Continued in Next Column.

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clouds on the horizon. It was difficult to realise that the man who was to have married her next month was away yonder, snatched out of her life. Often pressed men did not come home for years; very often they never returned; the sea took them and kept them, or rather the bones of them. The great ships went to and fro, but the men never returned.

Ruth met old John Iden in the meadow in front of the farmhouse, and she told him the news bravely, feeling that he was a man and would bear it.

He just stared at her in a kind of blind way, for he was a quiet man was John Iden, patient and rather slow. Presently his lips moved; he looked shaken.

"I never would have believed it. They had no right to take him. I'll set the law to bring him back."

He spoke half-heartedly, facing what the girl had faced already. No one could live within five miles of a port and remain ignorant of the truth; when the King's Navy laid its hands on a man it kept him, and the people at home might make what potter they pleased.

"I set no hopes on that, father."

He looked at her with sudden tenderness touched by the word she had used.

"It falls hard on you, child."

She answered quietly.

"I'll wait—if I have to wait till I die. I may be some comfort to you and to mother, seeing that you had no one but Tom."

He nodded his head.

Will you go in and tell her, Ruth?

You will tell her, she said.

To BE CONTINUED.

LE

flavour is delightful
-forming nutriment
f nitrogenous food

BURY

THE STAR
DEC 22, 23, 24
1919

**FLOGGED THROUGH
THE FLEET.**

By WARWICK DEEPING

SYNOPSIS

It was the younger woman who
to soothe and comfort the elder woman
that morning, for if Joan Iden was
sweet soul she had not the strength to
bear such a blow without bending. Her
grief turned to bitterness and complain-
ing. God had dealt unjustly with her
the world was full of wickedness and
savagery; she had not deserved this
sorrow.

"My love is a love that can wait
and mother, I shall keep it for you."

Moreover, Stephen Venner had a passion in him; Ruth Tempest was the woman he desired; he had had his eye on her long before Thomas Iden had out-rivalled him and made him, as Stephen Venner thought, look a poor fool. Venner had a nature that did not forget and forgive; he was masterful, a spoilt boy who had grown up into a tyrannical and impatient man.

He did not talk much to Ruth, but he looked at her a good deal with those rather hungry brown eyes of his. It was as though he were trying to read what lay behind her calm and unemotional pallor.

"You won't believe me, Ruth, but I'm sorry about Tom Iden."

"Why shouldn't I believe you?" she answered him quickly, not afraid to look him in the face.

"Because you know what I wanted—ones. And I wanted it very badly, Ruth. But I'm a man; I know what Tom Iden must be feeling."

"Why should I doubt your sincerity, Stephen? As for me—I am waiting—and I shall go on waiting."

He glanced at her keenly, and her calm, white profile did not flinch. Ruth Tempest had something that was heroic in her. It would not be easy to make her forget.

forset. Ruthven Vennor might be a rogue, but he was a patient rogue, one of those men who can see success a year ahead, and not rush in tempestuously on failure. He began to ride more often to Kings Oak, and to take his time in the morning, to work, or to make his purpose too obvious to Ruth herself. In a way he wooed her by not wooing her. He was a pleasant fellow at a supper table, and good to look at, if it were not for the fact that there and about that time in Redminster he was very much the bachelor of a dozen young women's dreams. He would smoke a pipe with Mr. Christopher, and be a good deal of gossip about business, even ask his advice, till old Tempest found himself thinking of Stephen Vennor as the

"It's bad luck on Tom Iden," he said, "but the lad can't grumble if some things happen. I don't know if I shouldn't be glad to see young Veneer cruising in and carrying her off. He'll be the richest man in Redminster one day."

His wife was a plain, downy person.

"Ruth won't have him."
"How do you know?"
"It's what a woman knows, not what a man thinks."

Stephen Venner let some months go by before he began to make open love to Ruth. He was repulsed, and repulsed with vigour, but he was clever enough to show good temper.

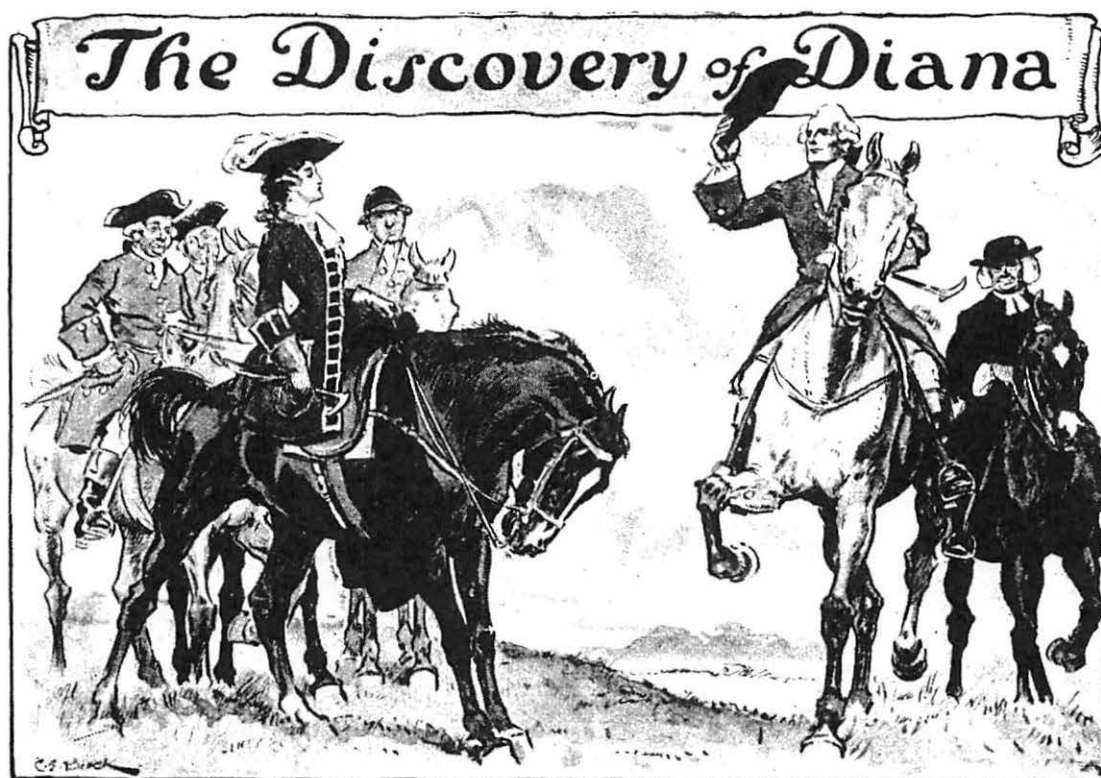
"I can't help being a man, but when you are the woman you are, isn't as though you were married Tom Eden."

"You can't expect me to look on you as married. Tom may never come back, he may not want to come back."

"Never speak to me like that," Stephen Venner.

CONTINUED ON PAGE ELEVEN

Dec-1911 Cassell's



A ROMANCE OF THE HUNTING-FIELD

By WARWICK DEEPING

SIR RICHARD LUTTERELL stood at the library window at Hucknor House, and cursed the weather.

"Perdition take this English climate! Here am I—home—after three clear years—and three days of it make a man dog-sick and savage."

A thick mist made the outer world look grey, sodden, and utterly dreary, and the raw cold of a December morning bit to the bone, even though a log fire roared up the chimney. Sir Richard heaved up his shoulders, and stared with infinite disgust at the great oaks of the park that looked like miserable ghost trees smothered in grey woe. He rapped one heel on the floor, yawned, and frowned at his own ennui.

"Confound it—a man must do something!"

He turned savagely against his own

boredom, walked to the door, flung it open, and stared down the long, sunless gallery. A tall man, swarthy strong, with a certain quick imperiousness, he had walked high-headed through life, not troubling to take note of other people's shoelaces. He had not patience with patience. Things either pleased him or they were charged and routed at a gallop.

"Baxter—Baxter!"

The voice was not coarsely loud, but it carried. Some men speak, and things happen. Richard Lutterell was that sort of man. A door opened somewhere. Old Baxter's agitated and wheezy monologue became audible.

"Oh—dear! Bless my bones! This cold catches me across the middle. Hot rum and water—something warm under one's shirt. Oh—Jericho! Sir?"

Lutterell smiled.

"The hounds meet at Holly Hill, Baxter?"

"At eleven, sir."

"Fog or no fog?"

"Squire Brandon—sir——"

"Oh—I know! The same old red man with a voice like a bull. Tell Sims to bring a nag round by ten. That young roan he showed me yesterday will do."

Old Baxter blew apologies.

"Ten, Sir Richard. But—the roan, sir. Sims says——"

"The horse is a devil! So am I, Baxter, when fools get in the way. That tongue of yours is like the flame of a candle. It will gutter you into a grease puddle if you stand and chatter in draughts."

Baxter toddled off, the tail of his wig down like the tail of a dog who has been treated to scornful words.

This was one of Lutterell's strong features—his scorn. He had succeeded too easily in all the things that he had undertaken. Circumstances had surrendered too swiftly, and with an obsequiousness that had robbed him of the zest of his ambitions. Even in this quiet English countryside people were talking of the gallant things that he had done in the French war in Canada. He was the youngest colonel commanding a regiment of his Majesty's red-coats, and very probably he was the richest. Women too had disappointed him. They had allowed him none of the joy of the hunter. A man likes some show of fighting before the inevitable surrender.

The roan carried Sir Richard Lutterell across Hucknor Park, over Hog's Hill, and along the edge of Hucknor Heath. The fog had thinned upon the higher ground, and familiar landmarks loomed through the grey haze. They stirred Lutterell to reminiscences, though for the moment he rode superior to all regrets.

"So—there's Lavender's Mill—and old Brandon's brick warren—and Soncing church spire! Gad—what a dull lot I should find them now down yonder! The same fat faces, the same wigs, the same tales, the same old jokes! The women too—bundles of clothes, too good to be interesting, too vulgar—when they are bad."

He smiled a little contemptuously as his thoughts became more personal and intimate.

"And little Diana Brandon! What a fool I was over that raw girl! I wonder whether she has forgiven me for discovering my own folly? Forgotten all about it, no doubt. Married to some bullet-head, and a proud mother sitting by the fire and knitting baby socks. Or, perhaps, a little spinster, very straight in the back, and getting thin about the neck and mouth. Di was one of the kind that grows old early."

He pushed the roan to a trot, with Holly Hill rising as a dim green mound in the valley below him. The faint cry of a horn came up on the heavy air. The roan pricked up his ears and curveted across the road.

"Tsst, tsst, sir! What is there to get excited about in this fog-choked corner of the earth?"

Then magic intervened. A wind sprang up from somewhere, rolled up the mist or rent it into tatters, so that far glimmering distances were deluged suddenly with sunlight. Blue sky showed between the rolling remnants of the wind-driven fog. Southwards the sea shone. Purple woods flowed in the valleys. Green fields caught the sunlight. A swift beauty seemed to gallop over the world.

Richard Lutterell laughed. The scarlet of his own coat became more emphatic.

"Vixenish weather! Still—it does not do to be pleased too easily."

The horn tooted gaily down yonder, and against the dusky hollies of Holly Hill red coats shone out like sparks in brushwood. Little flecks of foam drifted up the green hillside as though blown by the wind, the white bodies of Squire Brandon's hounds.

The first familiar soul whom Lutterell fell in with proved to be old Parson Swigger on his fat black nag. The very attitude of the man was historic. Black hat, white wigged head, and elbow were all tilted. The flask of rum and water was at the present, while the fat nag stood stolidly between two gate posts.

"Hallo—my worthy prophet!"

The parson turned a purple, beaming face.

"Jehoshaphat, sir! You—here? We heard that Hucknor had smoking chimneys."

He twinkled all over, fat and good-humoured.

"Hail, son of Mars, your health, sir. The merry horn on a merry morning. I'm glad to see you—glad to see you."

He corked the flask, shoved it into his pocket, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and picked up the reins. Lutterell had drawn up beside Parson Swigger. The hounds lay in a white moving bunch on the flank of Holly Hill, Jerry the Whip riding round and round on his grey horse. Nearer still were red and green coats on brown and black horses. Something feminine seemed to form the centre of the group, something in a black beaver and a green riding-habit mounted on a black thoroughbred. Old John Brandon was sniffing the air and talking to Jock the Huntsman about twenty yards nearer the hollies.

Lutterell smiled.

"All the old neighbours, Swigger! Plenty of young bucks too; more than I remember. And some new fascinator, eh?"

The parson gave him a queer look.

"Things change, sir, even in the country. She's a fine woman, sir, a deuced fine woman"; and he added "God bless her!"

"Grown up since I left! Who is the lady?"

"You may remember the girl when you see the woman, sir. Half the county has been at her heels since she rode her horse into Poynder's mill-pool during the floods and pulled Tom Lovegrove's youngster out of the water. A woman of spirit. Ride—too! It takes a good man to keep her in sight."

Lutterell said "Oh—the deuce!" and walked his roan horse slowly up the hill.

He was met with subtly different greetings as he closed in upon the group. Some lifted their hats cheerily; others looked at him with stolid doubt. Here and there men grinned, and exchanged sinister and suspicious glances. Restlessness, an air of hostile expectancy, took possession of the "meet." Lutterell felt challenged. It was as though the feminine thing yonder held court here, and these gentlemen in red and green were her good and loyal servants.

Lutterell nodded right and left. He was

cold of a sudden, and high in the stirrups. Then the discovery struck him like a spent bullet on the chest.

"Good Lord—Di Brandon!"

He did not utter the words aloud, but they were uttered within him by the voice of his own amazement.

Somehow he was there, close to her, raising his hat. She was looking at him too, with a proud surprise, very sure of herself, conscious of triumph. Did he remember the girl in seeing the woman? What had happened to her, that she had developed so wonderfully, changed into this serene yet laughingly splendid woman? He had never thought that she was so tall, or that she had such eyes. Surely these fool-squires were laughing at him, noticing who had the best of the meeting. Well, he was being stared out of countenance. It was he who should have been pitied.

Lutterell was not easily shaken. He edged his horse yet nearer to Diana Brandon, turned, looked about him with a certain cool haughtiness, and began to talk.

"By George, it does one good to see the sun. England has astonished me."

"What praise for England!"

"Oh—I am sincere enough."

He stole a glance at her, wonderingly, admiringly, marking her white beauty, the black haughtiness of her hair and eyes. Even here she had the advantage. Her eyes regarded him steadily, impartially, as though he were a great way off. And it came upon Lutterell with a flash of amazement that he had jilted this woman three years ago, shrugged his shoulders over it, and left her to think what she would of him.

He felt vastly uneasy.

"I am glad the fog has cleared. I nearly foundered this morning."

"You are not quite sure in the saddle yet?"

Her voice startled him. It too had changed.

"You mean—?"

"After so many weeks at sea."

"I shall get over the hedges well enough."

"We ride harder than we used to. Do you know that horse?"

"I am told he has a temper."

"Take care of yourself. Some of our gentry will plough gaps for you."

Lutterell felt like a raw boy who has been snubbed in the thick of a season of self-conceit. She had put him beneath her, without any show of effort. He caught grim and appreciative smiles on the faces of some of the men.

Then the horn sang, whips cracked, and old Brandon's big voice boomed along the hillside.

"We'll try Cub Coppice, gentlemen. Come up, come up, and the devil take all laggards!"

The hounds found in Cub Coppice, and there was a break away over the High Beech meadows. Lutterell, hat jammed on head, jaw set hard, went with a hot pride in his spurs. Di Brandon was away on her black thoroughbred, with her court of squires and gentlemen galloping in emulation. Lutterell had the devil in him, and so had his roan horse.

"Jove—the woman can ride!"

He was using the spurs to draw level with her, and to put his pride neck by neck to hers. They were over the first hedge like thunder, the roan yawing a little, and showing an inclination towards vicious independence.

They rode level. Diana Brandon's eyes came round to Lutterell for the moment.

"Water ahead."

He resented the way she gave him this warning.

"Thanks. Nothing comes amiss."

"Take care of yourself and of that horse of yours."

"Don't trouble about me."

"There is a gate."

"Thank you!"

"You may have forgotten."

Had a man spoken thus, Lutterell would have fought him the next morning. He felt piqued, furious, and drove in the spurs.

"Come. I'll show the way."

She did not answer, and her silence suggested scorn.

The hounds were half across the next field, and Jock well up on them, when Lutterell came thundering towards the water-jump. A sluggish brook ran on the other side of a thorn hedge. The roan swerved, refused, and sent Lutterell

out of the saddle. He crashed through the hedge into the brook beyond.

The place was famous for mud and weeds, and his emergence seemed timed to meet the salutations of half a dozen grinning faces. Diana Brandon was over, and had reined in. She watched the muddy, weed-bedraggled figure crawl up the wet bank.

"Hurt——?"

Lutterell shook himself like a dog. He was an absurd figure, but somehow the imperious nature of the man forced its way towards dignity through mud and weeds. One of those fierce flashes of generosity struck through him, flashes that had made his red-coats swear by him. The good in the man came out when he was tested.

"Damnation, how you ride! Upon my soul—I owe you this. I ought to have been in the mud three years ago."

Head held high, she looked down at him in surprise.

"I do not remember anything——"

"Then you are generous. My mud and my weeds are at your service."

She turned and rode on. Lutterell watched her go before troubling himself to remember his riderless horse. He was thoughtful, and a little grim.

"By George, that's a woman! And to think I——! Well, well, these fellows were right to grin at me, curse them! I may join in the hunt again—yet."

The man who rode back to Hucknor Hall was smothered in meditation and in good brown mud.

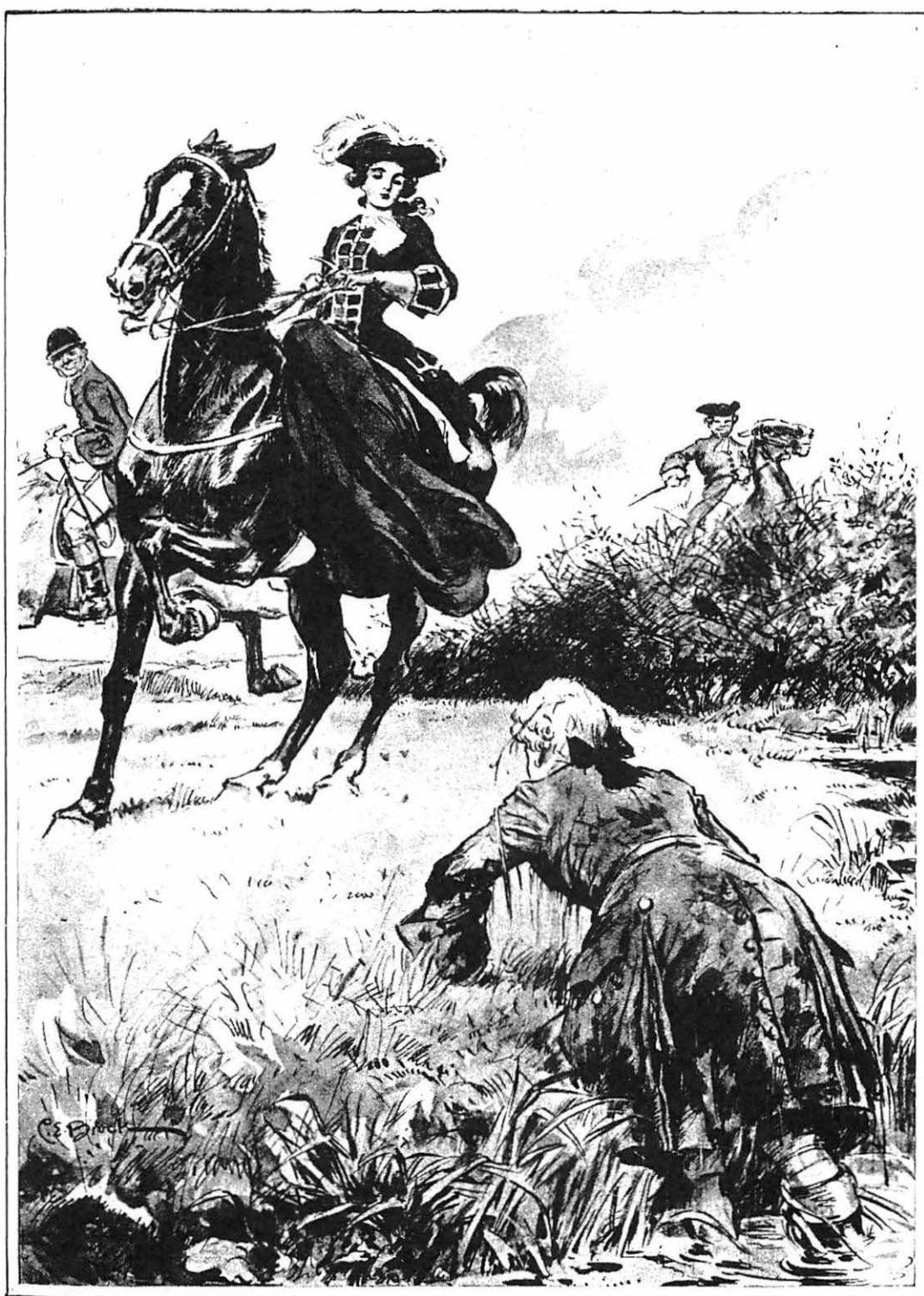
The countryside exulted over the episode.

"Gad," said Tom Furnace, Di Brandon's red-haired cousin, "the fellow had his ducking and deserved it. What——? Don't talk about the fool, sir. Lutterell had his chance with Di, and threw it over—threw it over! The deuce! And I've been pulling my heart out and offering it to her for two whole years!"

The young bucks sang the same song as Tom Furnace. They scoffed at Sir Richard Lutterell as an arrogant fool whom fate had smitten on the mouth.

"He won't show his face again Brandon side of Hucknor Heath," said they.

But it is never safe to prophesy about a man and a woman.



(Drawn by C. E. Brock, R.I.)

"Diana Brandon was over, and had reined in. She watched the muddy, weed-bedraggled figure crawl up the wet bank" (p. 400).

Christmas Day was a great day at Squire Brandon's red-brick manor house. Snow fell that week, packing itself against the chimneys and the old buttresses, whitening the statues on the terrace, and weighing down the boughs of the cedars. Squire Brandon kept open house. Bassoon, violin, and 'cello were in the music gallery, and the gentry came in their coaches to dance in Squire Brandon's hall. The yule log in the fireplace was cut from the bole of an oak. The armour and the antlers on the walls were dressed with holly. Good ale flowed down the bumpkins' throats, while the gentry bowed and curtsied in the candle-lit hall.

Red coats and blue coats, coats of yellow and coats of green, were moving to dresses of flowered silk, and rich brocade over the polished floor. The bassoon player's cheeks were like two red apples, when John the footman stalked in solemnly and shouted the name of a new guest.

"Sir Richard Lutterell."

The whole hall faltered in the midst of a minuet: the men, astonished and incredulous; the women ready to whisper and stare.

Richard Lutterell it was, tall, red-coated, white-wigged, haughty, sword at side. Old Brandon, warming his breeches by the blazing fire, glared at Lutterell and stuttered. Bassoon, violin, and 'cello went on playing in the gallery above. Diana Brandon, sitting in the great oak chair upon the dais, looked down the hall as though she had seen nothing.

Men murmured. They saw Richard Lutterell pass up the hall, bow to old Brandon, who stared at him in angry stupefaction, and move on again towards Diana Brandon's chair. He bowed very low to her, his eyes fixed upon her white slippered feet.

"Madam—I could not forbear from bringing you my Christmas wishes."

She looked at him steadily, flushing a very little.

"Am I to call this—courtesy, Sir Richard Lutterell?"

He bowed to her again, and then stood at his full height, looking her in the eyes.

"It is the insolence of a man who is unhappy."

"You are kind."

"No—I am brutal—to myself."

"Indeed. What is it to me?"

"Nothing. But may not a man be suffered to call himself a fool?"

The music stopped, and the minuet was at an end. The dancers split into whispering, questioning groups. Squire Brandon and Parson Swigger were near quarrelling by the fire. In one corner Tom Furnace and some of the younger men were eying Lutterell, and talking together.

"What! Stand this? Insolent beast! Not if I'm a man."

"Easy, Tom, it's Christmas night."

"Go to the —! Let's pitch him out—I say."

"Tom's right."

"Sure enough."

"Break the ice and douse him in the pond."

It was when he turned that Richard Lutterell found this angry group of young men closing in on him. Tom Furnace headed them, with his hand on his sword.

"Sir Richard Lutterell," said he, "it is news to us that you are wanted here. We shall be pleased to see your back."

Lutterell stood straight and tall.

"Mr Furnace, you can throw your scorn in my face. I take it as honest."

"Sir!"

"Let us have no horse-play. I am not the man to stand it, nor will I draw a sword in this house."

"Are you a coward, sir?"

"Mr. Furnace, I think not. Fool—you may call me. I will not say you nay."

The men exchanged glances, mockingly.

"The fellow won't fight."

"No sense of honour."

"The pond's the best place."

They closed in, a little cautiously perhaps, like dogs about a boar at bay. Lutterell held his ground. The men would have come to blows had not Diana Brandon stepped forward and put herself between Lutterell and Tom Furnace. She was angry, and did not trouble to conceal her anger.

"Gentlemen—stand back. I will have no quarrelling here in this house. Tom Furnace, your temper has galloped off with your manners. Who asked you to

brawl and squabble here like a boor in an ale house ? ”

They could not stand before her anger. She turned to Richard Lutterell.

“ Sir—I bid you leave this house. No one asked you to enter it.”

He bowed to her.

“ Madam, your pardon. My honour forced me to enter it. These gentlemen may hear what I say. I call myself a fool, a rogue, a detestable ass—before them. I take the words from my own heart, not from their mouths. Ducked I will not be. I have pitched myself into the mud of my own memories. Madam—I am your servant. And most humbly—I kiss your hands.”

He bowed once more to her with fine feeling.

“ Now—as I am commanded—I go.”

He walked straight forward, and such was the calm glow upon his face that the young men gave back and let him pass. Sir Richard Lutterell was not to be hustled by insolent hands. He paused before old Squire Brandon, who still swore and simmered before the fire.

“ Sir, a fool wishes you a merry Christmas. He would give much to win back your good will.”

At the door he turned again and bowed to the whole company. When he had gone, no one laughed. A kind of grudging admiration possessed them all. Tom Furnace, red-headed and sulky, spluttered what many felt.

“ Duce take the fellow, he did that well ! ”

“ It was gallantly done,” said another.

The music struck up again, and Diana Brandon stepped down from the dais to dance.

Weeks passed, and Sir Richard Lutterell remained at Hucknor Hall, riding out almost daily over Hucknor Heath, where he could win a glimpse of the red house in the valley. Whenever the hounds met he was to be seen on his roan horse grave, a little haughty, and holding himself aloof. He would ride up to Diana Brandon, uncover his head, bow, and turn away without a word. Yet every look and gesture said to her “ Madam, your very devoted servant.”

As for old Brandon, he could not decide what to make of Lutterell. Sometimes

he swore, sometimes he chuckled. Fifty guineas reached him as a donation towards the upkeep of the kennels. On his birthday, which fell in February, a most stately note was delivered to him by one of Sir Richard Lutterell's servants. He was asked to accept the Baronet's good wishes, also a silver-hilted sword that Sir Richard had taken from a French chevalier whom he had fought and killed on the Heights of Abraham.

“ Duce take the fellow's insolence ! ” said the old man, chuckling ; “ bless me if I know whether to snub him or to take it in good part ! ”

March came before Sir Richard Lutterell allowed himself to speak to Diana Brandon. He seized his chance one day when the hounds met on Barham Hill. Di Brandon had drawn aside to resettle her black beaver that had worked loose after a canter.

“ Miss Brandon, may I break my long silence ? ”

She looked round, startled.

“ Your pardon, Sir Richard—— ? ”

“ I have kept my lips closed for three months. Does that impress you with any idea of my sincerity ? ”

She smiled slightly, but kept her air of aloofness.

“ You may talk if it pleases you. It does not concern me.”

“ I set a very humble value upon myself.”

“ I do not believe you.”

“ No ? ”

“ You can take your place beside Tom Furnace.”

He looked at her gravely.

“ No—I shall not do that. I shall ride for the prize, but I shall take my own line. Do you think I have discovered what a selfish fool I was—for nothing ? ”

“ That happened so long ago. I have forgotten it.”

“ Pardon me—I have not. It becomes more vivid to me day by day. Think of me as a man who has learnt to hate the Richard Lutterell of three years ago. By heavens, I am in dead earnest ! ”

She looked at him strangely, and turned her horse.

“ Sir Richard Lutterell, you taught me

a lesson that I shall never forget. Never to surrender myself to a man."

"So—you have vowed that!"

"I have."

"That leaves me food for thought."

To deny a man of Richard Lutterell's temper meant to drive him ten times more fiercely into the enterprise he had in hand. To be told by a woman that she cared for no man and would marry no man, filled the soldier in him with a kind of joy in her defiance. The pride of her aloofness delighted him. It contrasted so vividly with the pride of most women whom he had known, with whom it had been a mere fan to flirt behind and to excite a man's impatience. Diana Brandon honoured her own freedom.

The black thoroughbred seemed made of his mistress' mettle. He went like a wild thing that morning, spurning all challenges. And Lutterell's roan was in the same fierce temper. He carried a man in love on his back, and there was no need of the spur.

Lutterell, galloping beside her, was a figure that threw a challenge to Diana Brandon's pride. She saw the passionate grimness of his face, and the glitter of emulation in his eyes. They were at war. They defied each other.

The hounds were at fault, and faltered along the edge of a ploughed field. Diana held her horse in for a moment, but a fever of daring and defiance was in her blood. She glanced round meaningly at Lutterell, and started away on an arbitrary gallop of her own.

He took her challenge and was after her like a shadow.

It was a wild scamper, a race between two strong spirits. The horses seemed to catch the fever. They ran level, taking the jumps together, slogging over wet fields, crashing side by side through hedges. Diana Brandon never turned her head. The man was beside her, and she meant to shake him off.

But he would not be shaken off, and she was angry. March had been a wet month, and the Swallow River down by Poynder's Mill was a swollen, yellow flood. Green fields dropped alluringly towards it, and Di Brandon turned her thoroughbred towards that yellow, swirling streak in the valley.

Lutterell frowned, and then smiled like a man who exults.

Within twenty yards of the yellow flood where pollard willows thrust their shock heads out of the water, she turned, and looked at him, her chin up, her face flushed.

"Dare you?" said her eyes.

His eyes answered her, "Through hell itself."

She pushed her horse forward, and in ten seconds he was swimming, the water washing over his back. The surface was full of ugly little pools and eddies, and here and there a broken bough or a bunch of brushwood came drifting down. Lutterell's roan shivered and seemed loth to follow. Touched by the spur he went in gingerly till the current carried him off his legs. Both horses drifted down stream to where the far bank was higher and more steep, and stood marked by a row of half-submerged thorns.

Lutterell saw Diana try to land, and fail. The steep bank gave the beast no footing, and for the moment she was in danger of being rolled off into the water. She recovered herself, and control of her horse, and turned his nose down stream.

Lutterell had overtaken her, their horses swimming side by side.

"This is worth living for."

She glanced at him questioningly, and then at the bank.

"It is lower—we can land."

"As you please. You—and the adventure go hand in hand."

In another minute they had landed, and were looking back across the swollen river. Di Brandon was wet to the waist. Lutterell, flushed and proud, uncovered to her.

"Well done, by George! If you were in command of a regiment of horse they would follow you anywhere. I'd gladly be the youngest cornet."

His admiration was a sweeping exultant impulse. He saw her flush.

"What a cavalry leader! What a comrade in arms!"

She rode on, looking into the distance. Lutterell could not take his eyes from her face. He was inspired.

"Di—forget what an accursed fool I was three years ago. I tell you I have knocked through life, and the things I



(Drawn by C. E. Brock, R.I.)

“Gentlemen—stand back. I will have no quarrelling here in this house”
(p. 402).

have learnt have made me infernally lonely. Good God, there are not ten women like you in the whole world—and I'd give my sword to call you comrade. You can make a man feel humble. The world's too full of sighing simpletons in petticoats. I've been outridden and defied—and by George—it's a joy to me."

She drew in, looked at him shrewdly, and said:

"How long would the mood last, Sir Richard?"

He met her look, as a man looks at a man.

"You think you have me there—but no! I'm no longer a high road fool. I've roughed it; I've had knocks; I've been sickened by too much success. I want a woman who can say "Dick Lutterell—you go to blazes"—a woman who can laugh—and hold her own. I

won't give twopence for a woman who can't hit back—and shake hands like a man."

She said, very quietly:

"My skirt is wet to the waist, and the horses will catch cold. We had better ride back by the mill."

He bowed his head to her.

"My thanks for the 'we.'"

"That was a slip of the tongue."

"Good comrade, use your tongue to me as you please. A soldier is obliged to follow his colonel. He is shot for deserting."

"Then—who are you to be shot!"

"A man cannot be shot for refusing to desert his officer."

"But his officer's orders?"

"He can be expelled the regiment—but only for bad conduct. Until then——"

She laughed.



The Christmas "Little Folks"

A FEAST of fun, frolic, colour, adventure, and all the good things that go to the making of a "Merry Christmas," is provided for children in the Christmas number of "Little Folks," which has just been published. There is a most attractive cover, a companion picture as frontispiece, and no fewer than sixteen other full pages all printed in colour. These pictures, by John Hassall, Frank Hart, Rosa Petherick, and other well-known artists, will be an endless source of delight to young and old alike. The fact that it is the first number of a new volume gives it additional importance, for among the contents are the opening instalments of two splendid new serials, "A Nest of Malignants," by Dorothea Moore, one of the most popular living writers for girls, and "The Baymen," a thrilling story of a boy's adventures among smugglers, by W. Bourne Cooke. Besides these the number contains many complete stories, all redolent of Christmas, and interesting instalments of the regular features, "In the Magician's Den," the "Ward and Home Pages," and "The Nature Club."



"PRIDE AND THE WOMAN"

By WARWICK DEEPING



IT was raining, and Monsieur Giles sat at dinner in the blue salon of the Château of Liancourt. Old Pierre Grandet stood and served behind his chair, Pierre Grandet of the white head and the mouth like a flint. A brace of pistols and a sword lay at the other end of the long table.

"Pst!—it blows hard, Pierre."

Old Grandet grunted.

"Everything has gone mad, Monsieur; even the weather."

The wind came in gusts, driving the rain against the windows, and making the blue arras with the golden *fleur de lys* belly away from the wall. The great elms of the famous avenue of Liancourt shouted like Norse Vikings. Rain spurted on the log fire, and all the while old Grandet had the look of a man who listened. There were so many sounds swelling the unrest of that stormy April night.

"More wine, Monsieur?"

"Thank you, Pierre."

Monsieur Giles de Liancourt noticed that Pierre's hand trembled a little.

"Where is Jean?"

"Gone, Monsieur."

"And Gregoire and the grooms?"

"Gone."

"The devil! So they have all gone—but you! I think you are a brave man, Pierre."

"Monsieur, I copy my master. Will it please you to eat some olives?"

"Olives—excellent! Take a glass of wine, Pierre, and drink to your own health."

"My own health, Monsieur?"

"The health of a brave friend."

Pierre Grandet filled a glass and drank, and as he drank he looked at his master lovingly and with a kind of grim pride. Here was a gentleman whom it had been a pleasure to serve, this last of the Liancourts, this aristocrat with the hawk's beak of a nose and the proud, ironical eyes, this lean,

stately, absolutely courteous gentleman whom only mean men feared. The Grandets had served the Liancourts for centuries. Pierre might have been that Grandet who had fought over his lord's dead body at Agincourt.

Outside the château someone was running up the avenue under the clashing elms, splashing into puddles and keeping a hand on his three-cornered hat. He was a big man, and he ran heavily and clumsily, stertorous, panting, his stockings and knee breeches all mud. Sweat oozed from under his hat and mixed itself with the rain on his face. And he talked and exclaimed as he ran, like a man in an anguish of fear and impatience.

"Damn their pride! But who could expect a Liancourt to have any sense? Poof, these puddles are like ponds! Blood of Cæsar! What am I sweating for when I could swear it will be of no use?"

Pierre Grandet was bringing his master a silver finger-bowl and a napkin when he heard that hammering on the door of the château. The wind had dropped for the moment, and the silence seemed strange and unnatural. Old Grandet faltered for an instant, and then with a steady hand placed the silver bowl in front of Monsieur de Liancourt.

"Shall I see who knocks, Monsieur?"

De Liancourt dipped his fingers in the water.

"Certainly, Pierre. But I forbid you to open the door if the visitors are from Fruges. I will open my own door to them."

Grandet bowed and disappeared, but he was back again in two minutes with a fat, red-faced man in black, all muddy about the legs, and wet to the skin.

"Lawyer Malasherbes, Monsieur."

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Giles de Liancourt turned in his chair.

"What—you—Malasherbes? Sit down, man."

The lawyer's belly and chest were still heaving.

"Monsieur, it is no time for sitting. The 'red caps' are on the road from Fruges and marching by way of Mesnil. I slipped out of the town after dark."

De Liancourt rose.

"And came to warn me. Monsieur Malasherbes, I have yet another brave friend, and my heart is proud because of it. Wine for Monsieur Malasherbes, Pierre."

The lawyer drank, but his hand shook so as he tilted the glass that some of the red wine dribbled down his chin.

"So our friends are paying a visit to Mesnil before honouring my house. I trust that Mademoiselle Diane will not be there to receive them."

Malasherbes put down the glass.

"I know nothing about that headstrong young woman, Monsieur. My business has been to warn you and then to get back to Fruges as quickly as I may. Every Jackanapes in the town is a great man nowadays. It is easy to get hanged for having muddy shoes. I trust you will leave Liancourt when I leave it—which is at once."

"And where would you have me go, my dear Malasherbes?"

"The frontier or the coast; the chances are about equal."

"And run away from the rabble of Fruges? No, it cannot be done, my dear Malasherbes. They can come and cut my throat for me, but they shan't say they found me afraid."

Malasherbes threw up his hands.

"I knew it. Yet what sense is there in this pride, Monsieur?"

"All the sense in the world, my friend. It is a tradition. It is why I am what I am. And how did we gentlemen come to be what we are, and by what right do we hold our heads a little higher than the rest? It is because the men who begot us were prouder, fiercer, braver and more shrewd than the common herd. If I ran away from the mob I should cease to be Monsieur de Liancourt. I would

even wish Pierre Grandet here to forget that he had ever served me."

Malasherbes nodded his head.

"You are a fanatic, Monsieur. It is well, and yet I owed you the warning. I will wish you good night, Monsieur."

Liancourt held out his hand.

"Good night, my dear Malasherbes. I shall never forget this wet walk of yours. I thank you with all my heart. Pierre, will you light Monsieur Malasherbes to the door?"

The aristocrat and the lawyer shook hands, and Monsieur Malasherbes returned to the rain and the mud.

Giles de Liancourt ordered old Grandet to light more candles and to place them about the room. He had taken his stand with his back to the fire, his hands behind him, his eyes watching the old man.

"Pierre."

"Monsieur?"

"It is a wet night for your journey. Take that new cloak of mine."

"What journey, Monsieur?"

"Whither you please. It is not my wish that you should have your throat cut. And take this money."

Old Giles turned and faced his master.

"Monsieur, for once I refuse to obey you. To the lawyer you spoke of the pride of the gentleman, and I speak to you of the pride of a servant. Has a Grandet ever deserted a Liancourt?"

Giles's brown eyes flashed.

"By God! Nor shall you. And somehow, old friend, it is fitting that a Grandet should see the last of this château."

Monsieur Malasherbes had gone less than half an hour when the wind dropped and the rain ceased to beat upon the windows. A strange, expectant silence filled the house. The great elms of Liancourt seemed to stand and listen, and through the breaking clouds the full moon pushed its silver shield.

Suddenly old Grandet, who was putting the silver away on the buffet, paused and turned his head like a listening dog.

"Monsieur!"

They heard it—both of them—that human murmur like the sound of the sea in the distance on a silent night.

It grew and gathered, splitting into its various discords, the squelching and tramping of many feet, the grinding of heavy wheels, a surge of voices harsh with exultation and excitement. Old Grandet looked at his master, and then at the sword and pistols lying on the table.

Giles de Liancourt stood calmly before the fire.

"Our guests are arriving, Pierre. Go and open the door to them. I will receive them here."

"Then we shall not defend ourselves, Monsieur?"

"What—a scuffle with butchers and shoemakers! No. We will fight them with our pride, Pierre, a pride that cannot be broken."

Five minutes later the rabble of Fruges streamed into the Château of Liancourt, and Pierre Grandet, a solitary figure, met them in the great hall. He was carrying a three-branched candlestick, and some of those pot valiant gentlemen may have noticed that the flames from the three candles burnt straight, with never a flicker. Buchy, the butcher of Fruges, was at the head of the mob, a red-headed block of a man, with a blue scarf round his belly and a sabre slung at his side. He had not shaved for three days, and his face might have matched the colour of the raw meat in his shop.

Pierre Grandet looked him straight in the eyes.

"Monsieur Giles de Liancourt has been waiting for two hours. It is not usual for a butcher to keep a gentleman waiting."

Buchy's eyes seemed to swell in his red face.

"The devil—he shall not wait much longer. So he is here, is he, this aristo—you insolent old pimp?"

"Allow me to conduct you, and all these ladies and gentlemen, into the presence of my master."

The crowd laughed and followed him, for that swaggerer of a Buchy had had one in the face. And pushing towards the doorway of the blue saloon, squeezing, elbowing, they came upon Monsieur de Liancourt standing before the fire, dressed in his black satin suit, smiling ironically, calmly contemptuous.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I see you have ladies with you, too. I am afraid there are not chairs for all. Yes, Madam, by all means take that silver mug home with you. Ho, Buchy, so you are finding the old trade useful in these days. Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

For a moment there was silence. This aristocrat's scorn of them was so apparent, and he was so utterly without fear that these common folk gaped at him, almost awed by tradition. Then a woman screamed, and all the hatred that had been muzzled for an instant, squealed in her voice:

"Tear his damned tongue out!"

Liancourt bowed to her.

"Madam, your sentiments are as beautiful as your voice."

But it was Buchy who stopped the irresponsible beastliness of the mob. He was a demagogue and a bully, but he had come by a sort of savage authority, and he meant to keep it. Also he had a rough ambition and a desire to show this gentleman that a butcher—the new aristocrat—could hold the stage.

"Silence! Keep back, and put that woman out of the room. And you, Liancourt, I arrest you in the name of the Republic. It is ordered that you be sent to Paris."

De Liancourt bowed to him.

"I am charmed, Monsieur Buchy. Pierre, get me my hat and cloak. It is important that I should not keep these good people waiting."

They did not bustle him or jeer over much as he walked through the crowd with Buchy at his heels. His dignity and his apparent unconcern made these people stare at him with a kind of gloating curiosity. Moreover, the greater part of the mob was ready to scramble for the plunder, and showed more interest in the château of Liancourt than in its lord. Monsieur Giles passed down the steps to where a big tumbril waited in the moonlight.

"A new sort of carriage for me, Buchy."

"And perhaps the company will be to your liking."

De Liancourt mounted by the hub of the clumsy wheel, climbed over the side, and stood there like a man surprised. For there was a woman in the

cart, seated on a milking stool, her black hair wet with the rain, a rich brocade dress showing under the drenched cloak that covered her shoulders.

"Mademoiselle de Mesnil!"

His voice had a shocked pity. The moonlight fell on the girl's face as she looked at him. It was a haughty face, pale, quite beautiful, strangely calm, yet hiding fear beneath its bleak repose.

"It would seem that we are to travel together, Monsieur de Liancourt."

"It would seem so. But were you not warned—had you no time?"

The cart started with a jerk, and De Liancourt had to clutch at the side to steady himself. A number of men, carrying pikes and muskets, surrounded the cart and marched with it. Two of them were pushing old Grandet, who wanted to join his master.

"Get out, you old fool, and learn to be a good citizen."

De Liancourt waved to him.

"I forbid you to come any farther, Pierre. Happy are those in these days who can be forgotten."

Then he sat down on the straw at the bottom of the cart, and close to Diane de Mesnil's stool. And the strange part of it all was that these two had always pretended to dislike each other, and had managed to quarrel on more than one occasion. Mademoiselle Diane was—as Lawyer Malasherbes had put it—a headstrong young woman. She had a high temper, courage, and a fine seat on a horse.

De Liancourt repeated his question:

"Had you no warning, no time to get away?"

Her dark eyes met his.

"And you, Monsieur, were you warned?"

"Yes."

"And you did not go?"

"No. A De Liancourt does not run away from a mob."

"Nor does a De Mesnil," she said curtly, "even though she happens to be a woman."

He bowed to her as he sat in the straw, and his homage was a thing of impulse and of fine compassion.

"Mademoiselle Diane, we are of the

same spirit; and yet somehow I could wish that you had been—less brave."

She lifted her chin and laughed challengingly.

"The man's view, Monsieur. Because I happen to be a woman, I ought to be soft—and a coward."

"God forbid!" he said solemnly.

"I should be the last to call you a coward, but there are thoughts that fill a man with fury and with fear."

Silence held them for a while. The cart bumped on towards Fruges with its red-capped escort trailing around it, Buchy, the butcher, trudging along in front. The moon shone on Diane's white face and upon the puddles in the road and the pikes of the guards. Monsieur Giles de Liancourt, sitting with his knees drawn up close to his chin, looked over the tail-board towards Liancourt, where the greater part of the crowd had tarried for plunder. And presently he saw a red light grow and gather in the distance, the light from a burning house.

Diane saw it also, and spoke to him.

"The wretches! It is your château."

He nodded.

"Let it burn. I am not thinking of Liancourt."

"No?"

"But of you."

She gave him a quick, almost angry glance.

"Of me? Let me assure you that it is quite unnecessary, Monsieur."

"None the less—it may be—inévitable. Do not let us quarrel to-night, Diane."

She caught her breath, and gave him her hand for a moment.

"No. I understand you, Monsieur Giles; you were always a brave man. I wish to be brave—also."

He pressed his lips to her hand.

"May God help us both!"

But his imperturbable cold pride had gone. He felt greatly troubled, dismayed, baffled. This girl had challenged all the depths in him, taken away all his cool defiance of a mob's savagery. He was shocked, made furious by the thoughts of all that might happen to her. Outrage, the touch of dirty hands, her white pride thrown to the ground and ravished, that neck of hers slashed by the great knife, her face and hair all bloody in

a foul basket! He was horrified, quivering with pity. And all the while she sat there on her stool, silent, outwardly calm, pathetically brave.

The wheels of the cart began to bump and grind over cobbles. They had entered Fruges, and its roofs and the tall spire of its church caught the moonlight. Suddenly Diane de Mesnil gave a little shudder of cold fear.

Giles noticed it instantly and touched one of her hands.

"It is nothing," she said. "I am wet, and the nights are cold."

She smothered the vague horror that had seized her, and sat up straight and proud on her stool. But Giles de Liancourt's heart had quickened to her little shiver of loneliness and fear. Some instinct in him made him understand that she was afraid.

The cart turned into the Grand Place of Fruges, a great grey cobbled space full of rain puddles that glimmered in the moonlight. In the centre stood the Hôtel de Ville, with its stone façade and square tower, topped by an octagonal lantern. The "place" was silent and black and empty, and the tumbrel and its horse and escort made a lonely clatter over the cobbles of the sleeping town. There was nothing dramatic about their entry into Fruges, no tossing of pikes, no mob insolence to challenge their pride. The night struck cold, and the moonlight made it seem colder.

"So we are here."

Diane's voice sounded tense and strained. She was trying to prevent her teeth from chattering, for she was wet to the skin.

"I would that we were elsewhere," he said rather grimly. "I wonder what sort of lodging they will give us."

"It is too much to hope for a fire." And the little reckless laugh she gave rang hollow.

The cart stopped in front of the Hôtel de Ville. A soldier carrying a lantern came down the steps, followed by half a dozen guards and an oldish man dressed in black and wearing a nightcap, a man who yawned prodigiously. Buchy, the butcher, met him at the bottom of the steps.

"Hallo, Citizen Bauryard, give me a receipt for my pair of beauties, and

I'll get to bed. Here in the cart you have De Liancourt and the De Mesnil woman. Get the prisoners out."

De Liancourt sprang down and held out his hand to Diane, but someone pulled him back by the collar.

"No fine manners here."

Meanwhile a couple of men had climbed into the cart from the far side, and Diane was picked up and passed out to the men below, one of whom kissed her brutally as he put her on her feet. "The woman tastes good," and he laughed.

The lantern was brought forward and the man Bauryard had a good look at his two prisoners.

"Answer your names. Giles Liancourt. Diane Mesnil."

They answered.

Bauryard scribbled in a book, using a quill that scratched venomously, one of his men holding an inkpot. It was all very casual and contemptuous. The fellow who had kissed Diane stood behind and criticised her as though she were a heifer for sale at a fair. De Liancourt's eyes were like the eyes of an angry dog, but he kept firm control of himself and made no sign.

"Here is your receipt, Citizen Buchy."

"Thanks, Citizen Bauryard. Are these people to be kept here?"

Bauryard yawned, and his yawr changed slowly into a fantastic and crinkled grin. He had an original and very unpleasant sense of humour, and was making his reputation as a droll dog.

"To be sure. We prefer to keep them in pairs—like pigeons. They get a little mixed at times, friend Buchy, and often we get one man's wife with somebody else's husband. But here we have a bachelor and a maid; quite a romantic intrigue—what?"

He cackled, and the small crowd of men laughed with him.

"Samson, put these two birds in the Blue Room. It is nice and sunny, and they should sing there, and the good citizens can come and look at them to-morrow."

De Liancourt, very white and outwardly calm, bowed to Bauryard.

"Citizen, your wit is excellent, but I shall be grateful if you will deign

to exercise it on me and leave this lady in peace."

Bauryard winked at him.

"Comfort her, man, comfort her. Why, it's worth a bribe."

He turned and hopped back like a blackbird into the Hôtel de Ville, and De Liancourt and Diane were constrained to follow him, the man with the lantern going on ahead, and a half-circle of pikes moving behind. The whole building seemed to be in darkness. They were taken down a flight of steps, and along a corridor that ended in a solid oak door. A turnkey unlocked it, and Citizen Bauryard, washing his hands and bowing, wished them good night.

"I fear there is only one bed, Monsieur, but it may suffice."

The door closed on them, and De Liancourt stood with his back against it, coldly furious, yet wholly alive to the delicate irony of the affair. The cell or room was below the level of the street, and shreds of moonlight drifted down into it along a sloping embrasure or shoot that was closed by an iron grill. For the moment he could distinguish nothing in the cellar. Diane was standing somewhere in the darkness, but he could not see her face.

"Mademoiselle de Mesnil."

He heard the sound of her dress brushing against the wall.

"I am here."

"I can but ask your forgiveness for this shame they have put upon us."

"How can I forgive what you could not help, Monsieur?"

He had unfastened his dry cloak and held it out at arm's length in the direction of her voice.

"Honour me by taking this. I know yours was soaked by the rain."

"What is it?"

"My cloak."

"Please keep it, Monsieur."

"Diane, are you unkind—or generous? This may be more bitter for me than for you."

A hand came out and took the cloak from him.

"It is you who are generous, Monsieur."

"Generous? My God, might I but have the power to kill some of those swine! Women make things so difficult."

Her voice had a new softness when she answered him.

"Perhaps I am fortunate in my comrade. Where are we?"

"In a cellar under the Hôtel de Ville, and to-morrow or the next day we shall be on our way to Paris. Stand where you are; I am going to explore."

He felt his way round the walls, brushing past her, and hearing the sound of her breathing. In one corner he found a rough plank bed standing on two trestles, and he hailed it as a discovery.

"Here is a seat for you, over in this left-hand corner. Please take it."

He slipped back towards the door, and heard one of the trestles creak as she sat down on the planking.

"Where are you, Giles?"

"Here."

"I thought you were near me."

"I shall be quite at ease where I am."

"Have you anything to sit on?"

"Yes, the floor."

"Oh, but you must share this."

"I do not see the necessity. And, by the way, I have a scarf here. You will not quarrel with me for being blindfold."

She was looking intently in his direction, and her upper lip was trembling.

"If you wish it," she said, beginning to love him with all her heart.

Presently she lay down on the trestle bed, and, being very weary, she fell asleep, despite the clamminess of the place and her own wet clothes. Giles de Liancourt squatted in a corner, listening to the sound of her breathing, and pitying her with a pity that was very near to love. He was grimly regretting the fanaticism of his pride. Chance had loaded the dice against him. He had never dreamed of braving these sordid hazards with a woman as a comrade.

And then, quite suddenly, Diane started awake with the cry of a child who has dreamed an evil dream.

"Mother! Mother!"

She was panting, agonised, wild with the horror of the dark place and the future.

"Oh, my God!"

De Liancourt was at her side, half

sitting on the wooden bed, one arm across her shoulders.

"Diane, I am here. No one shall touch you. I swear it. Listen!"

She hid her face on his shoulder, her pride and courage chilled and dismayed.

"I cannot face it, Giles. Those beasts—and the women! I'm weak—and I thought I was strong."

He was the lover now—passionate, desperate.

"Courage, dear heart. You shall never have to bear it. If I have to—"

He paused, stiffened, sat listening, for a voice seemed to have whispered to them from somewhere out of the darkness. "*Semper fidelis*." The words came like an inspiration—the motto of the De Liancourts.

Giles sprang up.

"Pierre!"

"Master."

"Where are you?"

"Up here, Monsieur, lying flat in a puddle, up against the grating."

"Good God, man! How did you find out?"

"It was not so very difficult. I followed you here—and slunk around like a dog—sniffing at likely places. And I ought to know your voice."

"Great heavens! Have you anything that's of use?"

"A bottle of schnapps, Monsieur."

"Yes."

"Some money."

"Yes, yes."

"A sword and a brace of pistols."

"Yes."

"And a stout iron bar."

De Liancourt caught Mademoiselle de Mesnil and kissed her.

"No more of the rats' pilgrimage, dear heart. If we are to die we will die like proud beasts in the open. Pierre!"

"Monsieur."

"Quick. The sword and that iron bar."

Pierre let them slide down the stone "shoot" into his master's hands.

"This grill is rusty and old, Monsieur," he whispered. "You are a strong man. I think you can break it."

"Is there no sentry outside?"

"Not a soul."

De Liancourt moved the trestle bed so that when he stood upon it his head and shoulders were on a level with the grill at the upper opening of the "shoot." He had given Diane the sword to hold and sent her to the door to listen for anyone moving in the gallery. By leaning forward and stretching out his arm he could just get a grip of the grating and pull himself up into the opening.

"Keep your ears open, Pierre."

"It is quite quiet out here, Monsieur."

De Liancourt was cramped and at a disadvantage, but the grill was set back about a foot and he could push the bar through one of the openings and use the stone wall outside as a fulcrum. The very first heave he gave proved the age and the brittleness of the ironwork. It twisted and bulged to one side. Another heave brought the uprights out of the sockets in the stone framing. In a couple of minutes he had buckled the whole thing out of its place so that Pierre could pull it into the street.

"All safe, Pierre?"

"Wait, Monsieur; I will go and see."

He slipped away and returned almost immediately.

"There is a sentry at the top of the steps of the Hotel. The 'Place' is deserted. We can get away by the Rue St. Juste."

"Were there any guards at the barrier when you came into the town?"

"Yes, two. But if Monsieur means to kill—"

"Yes, I shall kill them. Wait there, my friend, and help with Mademoiselle de Mesnil."

Giles de Liancourt slipped back into the cellar.

"Diane."

"I am here."

"The way is open. Is it your choice for me to die fighting—for you—if I have to die?"

"I would rather die with you—in the open—up there."

He caught her and held her.

"Diane, somehow love has come to me to-night. Who knows whether it will be life or death for us? Come."

She clung to him.

"Giles, promise me one thing—that I shall not be left alive. Better still—give me one of the pistols, if you can spare it."

"It is yours," he said. "I prefer to use my sword."

He climbed on to the bed and she followed, and taking her in his arms he lifted her up into the window opening. Pierre, lying flat, reached down so that his hands met hers. He drew her up, and getting on his knees helped her out into the street. Then he lay back again and thrust down a hand for his master.

The sentry was yawning on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville when these three slipped away down the narrow Rue St. Juste. It was three o'clock in the morning, and the town of Fruges slept. De Liancourt and Diane de Mesnil went hand in hand, old Grandet going ahead like a watchful dog.

Close to the church of St. Louis, about fifty yards from the "barrier," he turned and came hurrying back, having had a glimpse round the corner of the church of two men sitting beside a brazier of burning wood.

"There are two guards, Monsieur," he said.

"Only two? Wait here, Grandet, and guard Mademoiselle Diane. When I call to you, join me."

He hid his sword behind him, took one of Diane's hands and kissed it.

"When a man loves he fights. In a minute you shall pass as you please."

She shrank against the church wall as he walked away, but old Grandet

poked a head round a buttress and watched all that happened. Giles de Liancourt walked boldly and at his leisure towards the barrier, keeping to the middle of the street. One of the men jumped up and held his musket ready. De Liancourt walked straight on, his sword behind his back.

"I make the rounds for the Republic. Has anyone passed the barrier the last hour?"

"No, citizen."

"Beware how you answer me. An aristocrat has escaped."

The two men slouched up to him, inquisitive, protesting, and met his sudden sword. Neither of them made a sound. It was done quickly and well.

Old Grandet did not wait for an order. He caught Diane by the wrist and ran, and the three of them passed the barrier and out into the moonlit country outside Fruges.

Giles and Diane, walking hand in hand, looked long and intently into each others' eyes.

"I am no longer afraid, dear," she said.

"God be thanked!" he answered. "Even though a woman has taught me to feel afraid."

She rested her head on his shoulder.

"I am so sorry, Giles."

He looked straight down the road ahead of him.

"It will not be the 'knife,' but a clean death," he said very quietly, "if it be death at all. But I shall fight—fight like a savage—before you have to use that pistol."



The Trouble

FATHER (to daughter's young man): "My gas bill is greatly increased this quarter. Do you know the reason?"

Young Man: "Perhaps there is something wrong with the meter."

Father: "That's just the cause. You meet 'er far too often."



Mean of Her

"WHAT was Mrs. Brown talking about to-day, dear?"

"About all the time, I guess, judging from the noise."

His Specialities

YOUNG Huggins calls on Gladys Mae,

And sticks and hangs for hours.

The maid admires his clinging way;

Her Dad, his staying powers.



Disappointed

"Do you find that set of books you bought interesting?"

"Not very," confessed the man who tries to improve himself. "But I'd feel better about it if the man who comes around to collect were as good an entertainer as the one who sold me the books."

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By WARWICK DEEPING



DAVID KERR climbed to the third floor of the Hotel Santa Maria, and walked slowly along the gallery to the door of No. 57. He had a couple of letters in his hand, and his face was the face of a man who was angry.

He knocked.

"Are you there, Mabel?"

A voice said "Come in."

He found his wife sitting in an arm-chair at the open window that overlooked the river valley and the sea. The hotel seemed to float on the tops of a forest of firs, and the vine terraces on the opposite hillside looked like patterns upon a wall. But Mabel Kerr was not concerned with the landscape or the colour of the sea. She had just finished her coffee and rolls, and her hair was still hidden by a coquettish little lace cap.

She turned a book face downwards on her knee. Her husband had closed the door, and there was that air of fierce restraint upon him that she, the wife, had created and developed.

"I have had these."

He held out the letters.

She just looked at him and turned her head away. She was a pretty woman, in a smart, hard style. Her lips were too thin, her nostrils too voracious.

"Oh—have you!"

"Three hundred francs!"

"Not more than that?"

"For lace, tortoiseshell, petticoats, and a hat!"

She made no move, but her quietude was combative, scornfully so.

Kerr studied her with cynical eyes.

"You know why we came out here, Mabel."

"Have I ever been allowed to forget?"

"To economise, to try and save the situation. I discovered this most delightful refuge. But I might have known——"

He pulled himself up and left the more bitter things unsaid. His wife was looking out towards the sea, and she was smiling as a selfish woman smiles at times when she looks pitilessly at the truth.

"We were a pair of fools to marry. Why on earth did we marry? I like success, David; I admire it."

"Call it money," he said.

"Well—call it money. You write books, clever books—but they do not—take on. You were not even clever enough to safeguard yourself against your publisher going bankrupt. Sheer foolishness!"

She twitched her shoulders.

"We live only once. I'm proud, David; you should be a woman—to know how other women sneer. I'm hard, too; that's why you make me angry."

He turned to go.

"What's the solution, Mabel, eh? I have eight hundred francs left, and here are bills for three hundred. I can expect no more money till April. What's the solution? Good God! I'm not a money-making machine."

She answered ironically.

"I know."

Then her impatience burst forth.

"You haven't the drive in you; you can't fight; you can't go down into the pit and take money by force. Other men can. Ah! I love that ruthlessness, that lust for power, that madness that must be up above the mob. And you—you and your miserable books; who cares! Can

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you compel anyone to do anything? Can you make and unmake other men? Can you buy—buy—buy, catch life by the throat and take what you please? And you despise me—because—I love these things! Oh, my dear man, is my scorn any less than yours? Your honour is in a panic over a five-pound bill. Your little ideals are good enough for making daisy chains. I want the big things, not the two and eleven three farthings philosophy."

He had his hand on the handle.

"You hadn't a penny when I married you," he said.

"That proves nothing. If I had been born a man——"

He went out, closing the door softly.

For half a minute David Kerr stood at the corridor window, a window that showed him the grey mountains cutting the blue of the southern sky. A far-away look came into his eyes. His right hand went to the breast pocket of his coat, and felt something that lay hidden there. Then he descended the stairs, and, turning into the cloak-room, took his hat and a light, steel-pointed stick that he used for the hill paths.

As he crossed the lounge a smart woman in grey tweeds rose at him from behind a palm.

"Oh, Mr. Kerr, your wife is coming with us in the golf motor. We thought of having a foursome. Mr. Tweedale can't turn out. Do join us."

"I'm sorry. I'm off for the day. You are sure to be able to pick up someone at the club house."

"Bad man!"

"Another day. Besides, I'm not much good."

He went out into the garden, and round by the orange walk that led to the mule path—the mule path that would have taken him down to the town. Peach trees were in bloom, a soft pink against the blue depths of the valley. The vine terraces were dusted with the blue grape hyacinths and the yellow cups of the dwarf spurge.

Kerr turned and looked up the path towards the little brown chalet that stood in front of a clump of olives. Between him and the chalet a rock projected, and a girl sat there, painting. Below the rock was a water cistern in which the sky and the clouds were reflected.

Kerr went up the path till he came to where the girl sat. She had a little oval face with large brown eyes, and a mass of brown curls framing it. Her skin was remarkably delicate and had too sensitive a colour. She wore the simplest blouse and skirt, and her shoes were rather shabby.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

They were not strangers; one could have told that instantly from the way they looked at each other. There was some magnetic bond of sympathy between them. They both had suffered.

Kerr looked over her shoulder.

"I like that."

"Do you?"

"Those peach trees, and the grey stone."

He sat down on a rock about five feet away from her so that he could see her face.

"How are you feeling?"

"I?"

She coloured and half closed her eyes.

"Oh, I am better. I believe I am well."

"Another fortnight, is it not?"

"Yes."

"It ought to be a year."

She laughed and threw him a quick little glance, and went on with her painting.

"I don't dream about impossible things. What's the use! I was lucky to be given the chance to come here for four months. What are you doing to-day?"

He sat holding his stick across his knees, his eyes staring into the distance. "I don't quite know. I really don't care."

She looked at him intently, her brush motionless.

"I wish I could help."

"Thank you, Kitty, but you can't. Oh, I think I have come to the cross-ways. I am not going on choosing for ever."

He was not looking at her, and he did not see the concern in her eyes.

"Life—is—pulling through."

"Is it worth it—always?"

"Ought one to ask that?"

His eyes met hers, and this time hers avoided his. She had to conquer a tremor of the mouth and lips.

Kerr rose.

Number 35

"I have a train to catch. I wish you had more than another fortnight, Kitty."
"I hope the sun will shine every day!"

He stood looking down at her for a moment, protectingly and with a fatalistic sadness.

"Good-bye. I must be off."

She watched him hurry away down the cobbled path.

It had calmed him to be near her, and the knowledge that she sympathised and understood had chastened his madness for a moment. For David Kerr was mad that morning, mad with the fatalistic frenzy of a silent man whose patience had given out. He had made plan after plan, only to be thwarted; he had tried to soften his wife by giving her every penny he could spare her; and she had shown her appreciation of his generosity by running him into debt. For David Kerr was a generous man. Mabel Kerr had never discovered that. She had succeeded only in being discontented with her husband's income.

Kerr was in the deeps, the bitter deeps of disillusionment.

"Money!"

He could think of nothing but money and the making of money as he went down the winding path. The landscape was blotted out; he saw nothing but the rough grey cobbles and the ironical inconsistencies of life.

"Curse the stuff! I was free of it—till—she—brought the taint with her. And Kitty—there! Good God, just going back to get ill again and die—for the lack of a hundred of those cursed yellow coins. What a scramble, a low, mean scramble, just to wear more on one's back, and make other fools envious. I give it up. I'll throw these confounded notes into the sea."

He pulled out his pocket-book, opened it, and drew out ten fifty-franc notes.

"Filth!"

A breeze made the things rustle in his fingers. It was almost as though the Devil of Money answered him.

"Into the sea? No, by George, let's be consistent. You shall go down in one bunch on the tables and help to feed the machine that fleeces half the idle fools in Europe. And then I'll call a quiet 'explicit,' and leave Mabel to start again. She'll get hold of some fellow with money. What do I care! Oh,

Lord, I wish I could leave Kitty a hundred pounds!"

The casino terraces were crowded when David Kerr climbed up from the railway station. Pigeon-shooting was going on below, and people were leaning over the parapets and watching the sport.

The sea was an intense blue, and there was a slight wash of foam about the headland of Monaco. A couple of motor-boats were tearing out of the harbour, and out to sea an hydro-aeroplane hung like a huge black dragon-fly. But David Kerr had eyes for none of these things. His mood was too morbidly personal that morning to suffer him to see life with the impersonal eyes of the artist. He was a man in revolt, a man in a rage with the social life as it happened to be constituted.

He entered the Casino, made his way to the ticket office, was passed by one of the bland cynics in black, and given his card of entrance to the gaming rooms. Kerr walked straight in towards the nearest roulette table with the air of a clerk going to pass a sum of money over the counter of a bank. Play had just begun, and the great room was only half filled.

A man on a high chair called out "Faites vos jeux, messieurs." Kerr saw none of the faces gathered round the table. He put his hand into his breast pocket, took out his ten fifty-franc notes, and bent over the shoulder of one of the croupiers.

He hesitated. Then his own age suggested itself. He asked the croupier to place the stake for him.

"Trente cinq, chance simple, s'il vous plaît, monsieur."

The rake pushed the notes on to the number 35.

Kerr thrust his hands into his pockets and waited to see the accursed stuff vanish. He felt a kind of exultation at the idea of being penniless. It was as though he were ridding himself of some unclean thing.

The tray was revolving, the ball spinning. The two motions grew slower and slower. The ball dropped into a compartment.

"Trente cinq," said a metallic voice.

Rakes were busy, money jingling.

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Kerr saw a croupier counting out notes. They and his stake were pushed towards him. He had won more than seventeen thousand francs.

People stared. He stood there dazed, holding the mass of notes, feeling that Fate was playing a huge and ironical game with him.

He walked aside, came back, counted out three thousand francs in notes, waited his chance, and placed the stake on red.

Red turned up. He had won another three thousand francs—eight hundred and twenty pounds in two ventures.

Kerr hardly knew what he was doing. People saw him stuffing his pockets with notes and walking aimlessly about like a man half asleep. He found himself at the cloak room asking for his hat and stick. Then he was out on one of the terraces, leaning over the wall and staring at the sea.

Money had had the laugh of him. He had come here to make a mock of it, and it had turned and mocked him and refused to be cast out. The humour of the adventure was lost upon him, for he was in the deeps, and his hatred of the stuff in his pockets was bitterer than ever. His wife's materialism had brought this Genius of Money into his life; it had gripped and distorted his whole career, tainted his art, worried him so that his work had suffered. And here was this crumpled mass of money in his pockets! The irony of the thing infuriated him.

Kerr was on the point of setting those notes scattering along the terrace, to be scrambled for by anyone who chose to chase them, when he thought of Kitty Henderson. He thought of her sitting on that rock, painting, high in the mountain air, in the light of the sun. He thought of her in that London office, earning her thirty shillings a week, waiting till Death should return and claim the life that had been denied him for a season. What a sensitive, fragile, exquisite life to be smothered under the smoke and the tumult of London. He had known now for some weeks that he loved her, that she had become the sacred and unattainable thing that was beyond his desire.

Kerr walked straight down into the station, and found that a train was due

in twenty minutes. This money of his had suddenly become precious; his whole attitude towards it changed. He went to the far end of the platform, packed as much of the paper as he could into his inner pocket, and buttoned his coat up over it. The rest he left in his side pockets, feeling it now and again, and glancing suspiciously at anyone who came near.

He managed to get a carriage to himself, and all the way back he was busy making calculations. Eight hundred and twenty pounds—eight hundred and twenty pounds. Kitty should have five hundred; he would leave the rest for Mabel. It would carry her home to her people, and give her something to live on for a year. He had no fears for his wife; she was quite capable of making a better bargain.

In the town Kerr went to a stationer's and bought several big envelopes and a stick of sealing wax. He had become possessed by the idea that he might be followed, that the crooks and thieves who haunted such a place as Monte Carlo might be shadowing him. As he left the town below him, and climbed the mule path, he glanced back from time to time, gripping his stick and ready to stab its steel point into the face of any man who should molest him. These fears of his were but part of his exaltation. No one passed him on the mule path but a fat old German frau carrying a camp-stool, and a couple of girls who had been out in search of red anemones.

It was half-past two when Kerr reached the hotel. He had eaten nothing since petit déjeuner, and he went into the restaurant and ordered Pierre, the maître d'hôtel, to bring him coffee and an omelette aux fines herbes. He sat brooding and smiling to himself, pressing his hand occasionally over the place where that mass of money lay. When he had finished his coffee and omelette, he left a twenty-franc piece for Pierre, and walked into the writing-room.

Kerr wrote seven letters. The longest of them was to Kitty Henderson. It was growing dusk when he had fastened up a mass of notes in one of the big envelopes and written "Miss Kitty Henderson" on it. He slipped the other letters into his pockets, caught up his hat, hurried out into the garden to the mule



"He stood there dazed, holding the mass of notes, feeling that Fate was playing a huge and ironical game with him"

path, and up the path towards the brown chalet. The sky was all blue-green above the mountains, mountains that were black as coal. A few blood-red cloud streakings crossed the western sky. Presently a full moon would be rising.

David Kerr rung the bell at the chalet, and a French maid came to the door. Kerr spoke to her in French.

"Give this—if you please—to Miss Henderson. They are photographs, and important. Give it to her at once."

"Yes, monsieur."

He turned and fled down the path.

Returning to the hotel, Kerr went up to his wife's room, and left the other letters, and the rest of the money, sealed up, on her dressing-table. He glanced round the room at the things that belonged to her: her toilet silver, her row

of shoes, her skirts and coats, her silk petticoats hanging in the wardrobe, the door of which was open. A sudden thickness came into his throat. What memories had he to leave her? What a tragic disaster this marriage of theirs had been! Perhaps she would be glad in her heart when she realised that she was free.

Then—a feverish desire to have things done and ended seized him. A few people were having tea in the lounge as he passed through, but he did not recognise a single face. Fritz, the concierge, swung the door open for him, and he was out in the dusk of the garden.

The grey mule path ascended in a great curve towards the cold northern sky; it would take him to the main road that zigzagged up and up towards the

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pass. Kerr saw the little chalet, a black shape, ahead of him; there was a light in one of the windows near the veranda.

He was within five yards of the gate, and about to pass it, when a girl came hurrying out. She stopped in the middle of the path, and the gate fell to behind her.

"Is it you?"

Kerr felt that fate might have spared him this.

"Go in, Kitty. You ought not to be out—"

She had something white in her hands, and she held the white thing out to him.

"I was coming—to your hotel. Oh—David, I can't take it."

Kerr stood looking at her, and his love was a kind of anguish.

"Yes, you can take it. You must take it."

She came close, speaking in a half-whisper.

"David—I can't."

It was because he was going to die that he suffered his manhood to have its way. He caught her, and drew her to him, and kissed her lips.

"Kitty—oh, my dear."

She let him hold her, and did not resist, but her whole body trembled.

"Kitty, that was the one joy I had left, leaving you that money. No one will ever know. Oh, my dear—my dear—I oughtn't to be holding you like this. But it won't matter—I tell you it won't matter. And I'm glad you know—I'm glad. If only things had been different."

He felt her hands holding him, and he saw fear in her eyes. She was breathing fast.

"David, I'll forgive you. But you don't know—what it will mean. You have let the fire flame out—in me. Oh, my dear, my dear, where are you going?"

She was holding him now with fierce, fearful hands.

"Where are you going? What are you going to do? That letter of yours!"

Kerr felt like a man who had stabbed but not killed the woman he loved. He tried to put her hands away.

"Kitty, I ought not to have told you. It was a cad's selfishness. I'm going away, yes—now—at once."

"David!"

He had freed himself and had put her

gently aside; the packet of money had fallen on to the stones.

"Good-bye."

She reached out to him with a queer, wounded cry, but he fled from her, up the grey path between the vines; and she knew that the man she loved had made his choice.

She stood very still, her hands hanging limply. His voice came down to her out of the dusk.

"I only asked that one thing. Take—what I wished to give."

She heard his footsteps die away beyond the hill.

Kerr broke into a run where the path sloped down again towards the farther valley. He had a feeling that he was running to save himself and to save Kitty from a madness that might have been fatal to both of them. Moreover, he knew that he had hurt her, and her imagined pain was added to his own. He was out of breath, and a dazed feeling came over him. What did it all mean? Was it true that he was going to make an end of things, cut the thread of life, let it drop into the abyss of the unknown? Something in him rebelled. His heart was beating strongly and fast, and the sheer animal zest of nerve and muscle refused suddenly to be annihilated. He held up his hand in the dusk and looked at it. What a lot of work that hand had done—work that he was proud of! And was he to turn it into so much lifeless pulp because one woman's selfishness had maddened him and another woman's love had made him despair?

Heavens, this was sheer poltroonery! He stopped dead in the middle of the path, and found himself staring at the lighted doorway of a cottage. A peasant was standing in the doorway, and from the interior came the scolding voice of an angry woman.

The man came down through the garden and sat himself down under an olive tree. He did not see Kerr, who was in the shadow of a rough hedge. The fellow pulled out a pipe, filled it; and as he filled it he talked to it with quaint and shrewd affection, as to a friend.

"A man should come into the garden at such times, Mr. Pipe. Thunderstorms, eh! Hang it, but wine is good, and tobacco is good, and work is good. Why, to be sure, I am fairly well con-

tented with life. She has a tongue, but then—we have no doctor's bills!"

Kerr walked on. He felt saner.

"Work is good!"

He almost laughed.

Why, where was his backbone, his pride, his will to do great work? And what about helping other people—Kitty, perhaps? Surely he wanted her to know that he was made of finer stuff, that he was not a mere hysterical boy!

The path began to slope towards the main road, but David Kerr walked on and on.

He felt that he wanted to walk miles, to think things out, to tighten up his sinews for the to-morrow. Mabel would have read that letter. And perhaps she would see in his penitence nothing but the weakness of a fool.

He reached the road where it began to climb to the divide, a thousand feet above the sea. Pine woods shadowed it. Down yonder in the valley a stream splashed over the rocks, and the lights of houses showed on the hillside.

Suddenly Kerr heard a man running. He came round one of the sharp curves of the mountain road, a big, lumbering figure in a smock. He nearly blundered into Kerr, but pulled himself up and began to chatter, waving his hands.

"Oh—mon Dieu, monsieur, c'est affreux!"

Kerr could speak pretty fair French, and was able to understand the man despite the fellow's excitement.

"The motor, monsieur, that fool—he always drive like the devil. There were mules at the corner by the Red Rock. He come fast, and try to take the corner and miss the mules. Oh, mon Dieu! they hit the wall, and go over!"

"What motor?"

"They call it the golf motor, monsieur. I run for help."

"Where? How far? Where did it happen?"

"Half a kilometre up the road, monsieur."

Kerr ran.

The full moon topped the opposite hill as he climbed curves of the mountain road. It was a devil of a road, all zig-zags and sharp corners, bounded by a low wall on the outer side, with miniature precipices dropping from the outer edge of the wall. A skid or a burst tyre

at one of the sharp corners might spell disaster to a car.

On a curve below the Red Rock he saw a lantern moving and heard someone shouting, yet the valley seemed very still. Kerr came up the last traverse of the road panting. The moonlight showed him three mules standing under the rock and a great gap in the wall where the masonry had been broken. Kerr felt a horror choking him. The car had gone over the precipice!

He saw a man leaning over the wall holding a lantern. Another man was scrambling about among the stunted firs and the undergrowth that tangled the steep slope.

"Where is the car—down there?"

The man with the lantern turned sharply.

"My God, monsieur, somewhere. It broke the wall and went over."

Kerr scrambled over the wall and began climbing down the slope. He heard the other man below him give a shout.

"Here—here!"

"The lantern! Bring the lantern!"

Kerr was oblivious to the fact that time after time he came near breaking his own neck. He scrambled down the slope, clutching at trees and bushes, and the man with the lantern came after him.

"Here—here!"

Kerr stumbled suddenly on a peasant holding to the trunk of a young fir. Trees and brushwood had been broken. Directly below him Kerr saw a black mass wedged against an upjutting rock and a great pine. It was the car.

The man with the lantern gave a shout.

"Une femme, une femme. Ici, Jacques."

Kerr climbed towards the lantern. He saw the men holding to a clump of Mediterranean heather and bending over something that had been caught by a young oak.

"Ah, mon Dieu!"

Kerr reached the place, and saw that it was his wife who lay there, for the light of the lantern fell upon her face.

She lay all twisted, one arm flung out, but there was no blood upon her face. Kerr bent close, felt her wrist, laid his hand over her heart. There was not a flicker. She was dead.

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Then a surge of pity, such pity as a man must feel when death sweeps all the lesser petulances aside, rushed over him. He touched her face, almost tenderly, lifted one of the hands and kissed it.

"Poor child! Poor wife."

It seemed to Kerr that they had been labouring and struggling for an hour before they managed to carry her up the slope to the road. They laid her on a stretch of grass in the moonlight. A dozen men, with ropes, lanterns and poles, had come running up the road. Kerr left the rescue work to them, and sat down beside his dead wife.

What irony, what a tragic touch! She was dead, this woman who had hustled so to live the spacious, selfish, opulent life of the few who amass money. She had cared only for material things. She had been as a child crying peevishly for other children's toys.

Kerr was conscious of an intense pity, a poignant human pity that was not love. He, who had not greatly cared to live, had been left; she, the passionate worldling, had been taken. He reproached himself, wished many hard things unsaid. Life had been against her; she had been just a spoilt child.

It was close on midnight when a country cart worked its way up the road to the Hotel Santa Maria. There was another dead woman lying beside Mabel Kerr, the woman whom David Kerr had spoken with in the lounge that morning.

No one in the hotel had gone to bed, for the news of the tragedy had shocked everyone into wakefulness, but these people kept their compassion and their sympathy within bounds. The lounge was empty when Mabel Kerr was carried to her room, her husband following with the look of a sleep-walker. No one came out to stare, but in the salon and the reading-room men and women talked in subdued voices.

"Poor man!"

"They say poor Mrs. Denny was found clutching her golf bag."

"It would be humorous if it wasn't so pathetic."

"And that girl! She was frivolous, a regular scatter-brain, poor thing. It's too dreadful. And that beast of a driver was only stunned."

David Kerr sat by the open window

looking out towards the moonlit sea. The electric light was burning in the room, and the old clock in the church tower down yonder had struck two. Sometimes Kerr would turn his head and look at the still figure on the bed. He was still overwhelmed by the pathos of the thing and humbled by his own compassion.

The letters he had left still lay on her dressing-table. There was that money fastened up in its thick envelope.

Then Kerr had a queer inspiration. He got up, took the packet of money, and, crossing the room, laid it under one of his wife's hands. It should be buried with her, not as an ironical emblem of what she had worshipped, but as a confession on his part that life might have been happier for them both had he been less a dreamer of dreams.

Kerr was out very early, soon after dawn. He wandered up the mule path past the brown chalet, and he wondered whether Kitty Henderson knew. He went and sat down among the pines on the ridge of the hill, and all the bitterness of yesterday was as a little cloud that drifts over the sea.

As he was returning down the grey-stoned path, with the pink peach blossom showing up against the far blue of the sea, he saw a girl come out of the gate that opened from the garden of the chalet. She had something white in her hand, and she stood hesitating and gazing down the path.

Then she heard his footsteps, and turned; and he saw her eyes grow big and piteous in her white face.

She waited for him, and held out the envelope with the money he had given her.

"Take it, please."

He saw that she knew.

"Kitty—"

"I couldn't keep it—now. Oh—how horrible!"

Kerr took the thing from her, and she saw that she had hurt him.

"David, I didn't mean—"

"I know."

He stood staring at the white thing in his hand. Then his lips moved.

"Kitty—don't—leave me all alone. I shall want you—to help me. I've been humbled. She's dead, you know. She ought not to be dead; it's brutal. She

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so wanted—to live, and I—couldn't give her all that she wanted. I—was a coward and a cad last night. But—I must have some human thing to think of."

Her lips quivered.

"Don't speak to me now, dear. Yes—yes, I'm not hard. It seems wrong that we should be here—with the sun shining."

"It's horrible," he said, "but it's life."

David Kerr's wife was buried in the

cemetery upon the hill above the old town, where the black and brown roofs gathered about the weather-worn tower of the church. Here, among the graves, cypresses grew in stately companies, and the white headstones and monuments stood in a little world of flowers.

Kerr climbed there daily, going through the narrow main street of the old town, where the sky was but a blue band seen between the tall, green-shuttered houses. His wife's grave was on the higher ground, where the headstones and crosses were less crowded



"Kerr felt her wrist, laid his hand over her heart. There was not a flicker. She was dead"

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and where the olive trees came close to the cemetery wall.

Sitting there on the iron rail of the grave where a captain of gendarmes lay at rest, he could see Italy across the bay and white-walled Bordighera flashing across the sea. The cemetery itself was a garden. Banksia roses bloomed everywhere; geraniums clambered up the walls; some of the graves were smothered with violets.

Kerr would wait there like a man who expected something to happen. His face had softened. Each day he bought flowers in the flower market, and laid them upon the dead woman's grave.

More than a fortnight had gone by, and Kerr had not been near the brown chalet. He told himself that Kitty must have gone, without even writing to him, to him who needed her so much.

He had bought pink and white carnations one morning, and was spreading them over the raw mound of earth, when he heard footsteps coming up the steps leading to the upper cemetery. Strangers did not concern him, and he went on arranging his flowers.

The footsteps turned towards him and paused. He glanced up and saw Kitty Henderson standing there with a bunch of purple and white anemones in her hand.

"Kitty!"

"I did not know you were here. Shall I go away?"

"No. Put your flowers beside mine."

She came and bent over the grave, and her hands seemed to touch the flowers very tenderly.

"The porter told me where I should find it. What a place to lie at rest in! I think I should like to lie here—looking out over the sea."

Kerr was watching her.

"I thought you had gone back."

"I go—to-morrow. I meant to write to you—from England."

She seemed afraid to meet his eyes, and she lingered there bending over the grave, touching the flowers with her sensitive fingers.

"You are not going back to the old life, Kitty?"

"Yes."

"It will kill you."

"Perhaps—perhaps not. The doctor told me yesterday that I am quite strong."

Kerr stretched out a hand over his wife's grave.

"Kitty, I failed to make one woman happy. I was to blame as much as she was. The thought of it rankles, makes me feel that I have failed in something that can never be re-lived. My dear, won't you listen to me? It is no dishonour for me to say that I want you to live."

His hand was stretched out to her over the grave, and she stretched out one of hers to meet it.

"Not here."

He drew her away towards a low wall where the tops of the cypresses growing below threw clear shadows. Between the cypresses they could see the blue of the sea.

"Kitty, you must live. Oh, my dear, I want to spend myself to make someone happy. You don't know how empty the world has seemed; it was as though I were alone in a desert and had no one to speak to, no one on whom I could spend myself. You must not go back to that old life. Promise me."

He felt her hand grip his.

"David, is it wrong? I was so shocked that night—when I heard——"

"Because I made a blunder of part of my life am I to be forbidden to do better? Kitty, I can't live without you—I can't work without you."

She turned her face to him suddenly.

"Oh, my dear, can I help—can I be of use? It seems—so wonderful."

He raised her hand and kissed it.

"Go home, dear, to England, but not to the old life. I shall come, to keep you away from that. Thank God, for this work of mine. It can take you up into the mountains, if needs be—or over the waters in sunny lands. Your work—and mine."

She went to the grave, took a purple windflower from it, and came back to David Kerr.

"Lest we forget," she said.

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At School

THE STORY TELLER

By Warwick Deeping

" . . . Something had happened to him; his inward eyes had been given some new vision. Mary found him glancing at her in a queer, shy, wondering way.

" 'What wonderful hair you have,' he said suddenly."



AN ardent little man of five-and-forty, with a ruff of black hair and an aspiring and cheerful countenance, descended upon Lignor in Sussex. He was first seen upon Lignor Green, dressed in baggy knickerbockers, green stockings, black boots, and a white flannel shirt, wheeling a bicycle and looking about him with an air of large-hearted approval.

He left his bicycle leaning against the garden fence of the Queen's Head Inn, and went in to interview Mrs. Lavender, who was shelling peas.

"Good morning. Have you any rooms to let?"

Mrs. Lavender had rooms to let, and the little man, having smiled at a couple of old oak settees and scraped his boots on the sanded floor, made her an explanatory oration.

"I am Mr. Hector Higgins."

He paused, but since those mystic letters H. H. seemed to convey nothing to Mrs. Lavender, he ran on:

"I paint pictures, you know. It occurred to me that Lignor would be just the place for my country school. Pupils! Yes, there will be five. We should like to have the use of a sitting-room and the garden. There will be one gentleman and five ladies."

Mrs. Lavender raised her eyebrows.

"All single?"

"O yes, all single."

"And how long would you be staying?"

"A month or six weeks. I assure you, madam, we shall cause you no trouble."

Mrs. Lavender smiled. She liked this little man; he amused her, he and his five ladies. There was something about the great H. H. that made women want to mother him.

"Well, I can take you, sir."

And so it was settled. Mr. Hector Higgins came to Lignor with his school.

There were five of them—five young devotees, mothered and shepherded by plain Mary Vise. Mary was three-and-thirty, with grey eyes, a quiet, placid face, and wonderful bronze brown hair, a glowing frame from which her almost Dutch plainness looked out on a world that had given her no lover. But if Mary loved, she hid the secret in her tranquil eyes. The other girls eclipsed her.

Grace Mallory — brown and spiritual.

Morgan Rees—dark, flashing and Celtic.

Ida—the White Swan.

Gertrude Laskie—retroussé, mischievous.

Such was the catalogue. H. H., surrounded by a dream of fair women, sat down in Lignor with its cornfields and its beeches, and talked and lived "art" with these dear enthusiasts to applaud him.

He was a sentimental creature—too, a man of colour moods—or perhaps it would be more correct to

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say that his temperament—like a bee—visited many flowers for its inspiration. He painted the Tudor porch and the yews of Lignor church with Grace Mallory beside him. Ida, the White Swan, inspired him to pitch his easel among the cornfields and the red poppies. Morgan expressed mystery—the brown sheen of the pool in the Lignor beech woods. Gertrude suggested glimpses of the sea beyond the downs—yellow sand and girls bathing. As for Mary Vise, she suggested nothing—at least, not yet. As a craftswoman she was a hopeless dauber; she could see, but she could not translate. She was Martha as well as Mary, looking after the commissariat, sewing on buttons, paying the bills, seeing that things got sent to the wash.

They went for long rambles with sketch-books and sandwiches. H. H., bare-headed, a knapsack on his back, an ashstick in his right hand, led these expeditions, talking like a St. Francis, and lunging with that stick of his at beauty in a landscape or in a flower. They sketched, they sat under trees and sang. H. H., happy as a little sylvan god, radiated genius upon these devoted women. A baser man would have been ruined, but H. H. was too happy and sensitive a soul to become barely inflated. He needed sunlight, the sunlight of tender applause, not only for himself, but for that most sacred thing—his art.

He was a true artist—an interpreter, that, was his justification. The rest of him was a conglomeration of lovable innocence, blind selfishness, and equally blind unselfishness. He looked most at things outside him; less at things within.

Two weeks passed with no profanation of this little Arcady, and then one evening a brown, bullet-headed young man in flannels appeared at the Queen's Head and asked for beer. He wanted quite a lot of it. He had brought a big stone jar with him, and while that

jar was being filled he idled out into the garden with his hands in his pockets and discovered a little man and five girls sitting in deck chairs doing nothing.

The young man stared, selected Morgan as his particular type, and then idled back into the inn.

"Got people staying here?" he said to Mrs. Lavender.

"Yes—Mr. Higgins, the celebrated artist."

"Never heard of him," said the young man. "All those are his daughters, I suppose?"

Mrs. Lavender was corking the jar.

"Daughters! He's a bachelor. That's his school."

The young man looked thoughtful, a little amazed.

"We're camping, four of us, down by the river," he told Mrs. Lavender.

Then he picked up the stone jar and disappeared.

"Hang it, five of them! The old blighter!"

And that is how the camp by the river heard the news—four mateless Romans sitting on biscuit boxes, and preparing to eat cold tongue and tomatoes.

"I say, there's an old blighter—an artist chap—up in the village, with five girls!"

The camp sat up.

"What!"

"Five?"

"Any looks?"

"I've picked mine," said the bullet-headed one. "She's dark. You go and see for yourselves."

Four young men, a tent, an old boat, a motor bicycle, and a very dirty looking cycle-car on three wheels! H. H. hated motor-cars and motor bicycles, and his hatred may have extended to the young men who rode and drove them. But for him there was not a cloud in his sky—not even the shadow of a bullet-headed young man who had come to buy beer.

Next evening two of the campers walked up to Lignor. It seems that

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they were thirsty, but they did not carry their thirst away with them; they carried it and two long glasses into the garden and assuaged it there. They were very vivacious and talkative. Their names were Jack and Percy. They did not discuss art; they argued about lubricating oil and over-size tyres.

There was a very fine sunset that evening, and Grace Mallory persuaded H. H. to walk to the bottom of the orchard and explain to her how he would treat such a sunset in oils.

"Those vulgar young men," she said; "I look upon our garden as sacred."

They enjoyed the sunset, and when they returned to the garden they were surprised to find the two barbarians sitting with Mary Vise and the three girls, and talking to them as though they had known them since childhood.

"I say, you know, you must come down and see our old camp."

"Do you bathe—?"

"We've got an old boat on the river."

They were nice boys, and when H. H. appeared they stood up and were polite to him; they addressed him as "sir." It made him feel vaguely and uncomfortably old.

"Gorgeous country, isn't it, sir?"

"Such jolly old cottages."

They made a great show of putting H. H. at his ease, for though they were nice boys, they could not help looking on him as a "buffer." They had nicknamed him the "Pasha," for he had collected a superfluity of beauty in Lignor, and they were ready to relieve him of it. Youth has its charter.

H. H. was nothing of a prig, for he was a child of the mellow and innocent forties, yet these young men depressed him. They seemed so much older than he was—so lusty, so final, so sure of themselves, so very much like motor-bikes. He had a feeling that they were being kind to him, that he was awkward and shy and needed encouraging.

"Tood-le-loo, old thing. Cheerio!"

The absurd part of it was that they made him feel shy and awkward. He had nothing to say to them, but that did not matter, for Jack and Percy had an abundance of conversation.

And the girls liked it! H. H., glancing round at them, was astonished at their laughter, their animation. His girls, his spiritual daughters, smiling upon these young barbarians!

He was immensely relieved when the young men left, to the tune of "Good-by-ee," and repeating an invitation to them all to attend a camp tea. H. H. was worried. He contrived to draw Mary Vise aside and to confide his thoughts to her.

"I suppose it is all right?"

She gave him a mother-look which he did not see.

"Oh, quite, I think. They are just ordinary young men."

"I thought them just a little—"

"Precocious? They are very young."

Her eyes were saying: "Oh, my dear, don't you know what youth is, and the nonsense we all talk about it? It is you and I who are young. Perhaps you will find out."

From that evening disorganization and disaster set in. It was the decline and fall of the Roman Empire—the end of H. H.'s happy school. The decline was gradual, yet none the less sure, and Mr. Higgins—who knew nothing of the science of tyranny and was unautocratic by temperament, saw these young barbarians invade and destroy his empire. Art lost its fascination. He did not fully realize it until he saw the lad Percy gallop off with Gertrude on the back of his motor-bike.

H. H. glanced at Mary Vise.

"They are going to Brighton for the day," she said.

Brighton! The school was to have cycled to Petworth to see the pictures in Petworth House.

Gertrude was the first deserter, but she was followed by the

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romantic and mysterious Morgan, who allowed Bert to drive her to Littlehampton in his smoking tin bath on wheels. Ida was the next to fall. She went boating with Jack. Grace Mallory held sensitively aloof for three days, painting the church of Lignor and its yews, but the lad Harold sat on the grass beside her with such persistence that she forgot her vows and became a girl.

H. H. was deserted, an emperor without an empire. The sketching parties and picnics were no more, and even Mary Vise developed a quite unexplainable liking for sitting in the Queen's Head garden and mending stockings. H. H. was too good-natured a child to interfere. He went out alone with his knapsack, his sandwiches, and his oak stick, and tramped miles, but he did very little painting. He was depressed, uninspired, and perhaps he felt vaguely humiliated.

But that was not the end of it. The dethroned emperor was dragged out of his solitude and made to play with these young barbarians. They crowded up to the Queen's Head at night, bringing a gramophone with them, and made a joyous noise in the garden. H. H. did his very best to be young, to enter into the spirit of the thing, to join in the charms of "Yip I addy I ay."

He failed. He could not do it. He was too much of a small boy in the presence of these strong and boisterous young men.

Sometimes he had a headache and went to bed. Sometimes he made some sort of excuse and slipped away to wander down the field path to the beech woods and watch the moonlight among the trees. But how idiotic it all was! Being put out of countenance and pushed off his poise by four young men who were making love to four girls. He thought of his age—five-and-forty. Good heavens, he was a fogey; he was growing old!

Instead of controlling the school, the school began to control him.

"We are going bathing to-morrow."

"You must come, Mr. Higgins."

"Yes, do come."

Lamely he asked them where they bathed.

"The boys have a pool close to the camp. It is quite deep, and they have fitted up a diving-board."

H. H. looked appealingly at Mary Vise.

"But I haven't a bathing suit."

"The boys will lend you one. Jack has a spare one. They have rigged up such a jolly little dressing-tent for us with a sail and some ground-sheets."

H. H. still protested.

"But—I can't swim."

He felt that he was confessing some shameful sin.

"You can't swim!"

It seemed to him that their eyes and voices expressed astonishment, disillusionment. He was a fallen idol, a decadent who had shirked cold water!

"We'll teach you," said Gertrude.

"It's quite easy," quoth Grace.

By getting up very early for a long tramp H. H. did his best to elude the ordeal, but the school also had risen early, and he was caught before he could escape. Shame made him a deceiver; he pretended that he had got up to bathe.

Mary Vise walked as far as the bridge with them, but here she turned back. H. H. looked at her appealingly.

"Aren't you coming?"

"I can't swim," she said.

"Nor can I. We'll learn together."

She laughed.

"No. I'm a little too old."

H. H. had a premonition that he would make a fool of himself, but he proved a worse fool in the water than he had expected. He loitered and dawdled over his undressing, listening to the laughter and the splashing. They began to shout for him.

"Come along!"

"It's lovely."

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They insisted on his going in off the diving-board, and when he reminded them that he could not swim they were full of youthful encouragement. Jack and Harold were experts; they would hold him up. And H. H., desperate and miserable, went in off the diving-board flatly and heavily, making a Homeric splash. He went under, came up spluttering and struggling, and was seized on by two of the young men.

"Keep still, sir."

"Don't struggle. You won't drown."

It was a humiliating proceeding, and he made a bad pupil, so bad a pupil that they piloted him into shallow water and put him on his legs.

"Just splash about a bit and get used to it."

They swam off to join in a polo match with the girls, and when H. H. had grown cold watching their graceful water-play and envying them their strength, he climbed out with surreptitious shame and sneaked back to the tent. He dried himself, dressed, and met the wet barbarians with an assumption of cheerfulness.

"Never felt so fit in my life. I'm going on to order breakfast."

His imperial wreath was gone; he had left it in that confounded bathing pool into which he had fallen with such a resounding splash. He was surprised to find Mary Vise sitting on the parapet of the bridge. He was both glad and sorry to see her. Thank heaven here was one person who had not seen him floundering in that pool!

She got off the parapet and walked back to Lignor with him. There was something very reposeful and pleasant about Mary Vise; she had not changed; she had discovered no flaws in his dignity.

The wheat fields were turning yellow, and flowing like a river of gold between the green of the downs and the deeper green of the beech

woods. H. H. looked about him like a lost child sighting home. Nature, beauty, some quiet corner in a field with his paint box and a pipe.

"What are you going to do to-day?"

He glanced at her shyly. What a pleasant, quiet voice she had!

"I shall go up over the downs," he said.

And then he added, almost timidly:

"Won't you come, too?"

She smiled, and her eyes looked into the distance.

"I have promised to help Mrs. Lavender make jam."

"What sort of jam?" he asked.

"Plum—red plum."

He thought of the gorgeous colour of plum juice, and glanced at Mary's hands. Her hands were pleasant and soft and brown, and the picture pleased him; it was so homely, so reposeful.

"I shouldn't mind helping," he said.

"You? No, you must go and paint. Your days are precious."

"Are they? I don't know that—"

"Of course," she said. "How many men in England have your vision?"

He felt comforted, and after breakfast he escaped with gladness from four robust young women, collected his gear and tramped up over the downs. He thought that he would make a study of the sky and those rolling hills, but when he sat down to work he found that something was wrong. He could not paint; he could not concentrate; his eyes and his fingers seemed to have lost their cunning. There was a part of him that kept talking, babbling, upsetting his artist's atmosphere. "What a splash you made! How could they help laughing? They put you in a safe place and left you. Silly ass!"

Before half the morning had gone he lost his temper—a very unusual thing for H. H. to lose.

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He kicked over his easel, stamped about on the grass, and then went for a walk. He walked five miles, returned, ate his sandwiches and drank a bottle of ale, set up his easel again and tried to paint. His success was no greater than it had been in the morning.

"What a splash you made! How they laughed!"

But this time he did not lose his temper. He grew depressed, sad.

At breakfast next morning he asked her to join him on the downs, but she prevaricated; there was more jam to be made. He was disappointed; he went alone. The morning proved disastrous; he made a horrible botch of the landscape, and became obsessed by the thought that he was growing old. Youth, how virile it was, how full of swagger, carrying life at the gallop! He began to feel that he was not quite a man, a potterer, a creature who daubed canvases and could not swim, a ridiculous dreamer whom these young things laughed at.

He left his stool, sat on the grass, and smoked. He looked dejected; even his pipe seemed to droop like the proboscis of a melancholy insect.

Mary Vise found him in that posture. Mary Vise the wise and the mellow-hearted. He did not hear her come over the bank behind him, and he was caught in his naked dejection.

"You forgot your sandwiches."

She went and looked at his work, saw the sickness of his unapplauded soul in it, and sat down.

"You are not in the mood to-day."

No, he was not.

"Horrible butchery! I don't know what's the matter with me, Mary."

A little more oil was needed in the lamp, she knew that so well.

"It doesn't pique you," she said, "take a day or two's rest. Make jam."

Was she laughing at him?

"Jam!"

"It's an excellent and soothing amusement. But I was speaking

metaphorically. Sensitive people need a garden; and being a genius——"

He looked at her with his wide, spaniel's eyes.

"It's exacting."

"I suppose it is," he agreed; "but, you know, I think I just miss—great art."

"There are people who think otherwise," she said quietly; "don't you know how much joy and beauty you have given to many of us?"

H. H. blushed. He could still blush, and that was why Mary Vise loved him.

The days passed and his depression continued, but the most serious thing of all was that he was quite unable to paint. He had lost his confidence and his confident touch, and Mary Vise, seeing her man-child so melancholy and so ineffectively sad, went in search of the inspiration that would cure him.

She found it—a deep valley in the beechwoods, between Lignor and Stillinghurst — a great green mysterious valley that ended in blue distances. She christened it: "Green Glades and the Blue Beyond," and she returned with sudden enthusiasm to Lignor.

She found H. H. in the garden.

"I have never been so tantalized in my life," she said.

He looked at her flushed face.

"My dear Mary!"

"I have found the most mysterious spot in Sussex. I wanted to paint it, but it is beyond me, utterly beyond me. It would be sacrilege for me to try. You must do it. You are the only man who can do it. You must come with me to-morrow."

His eyes lit up.

"Great! What is it—woodland?"

"An enchanted wood that leads to the Blue of the Beyond."

They went, cycling together along the lanes. Mary had prepared a very exquisite little lunch, hot coffee in a thermos, fruit and cream. There is a subtlety in details—and food can be spiritualized to suit a

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romantic day! When they reached the place that she had chosen she watched his face and said nothing.

And H. H. said nothing. He was excited, absorbed. He got out his gear and went to work, and Mary made herself comfortable in the bracken and pretended to read a book. Sometimes she wandered away and left him quite alone, and each time she returned she noticed that he had ceased work and seemed to be waiting for a comrade.

She looked at his canvas.

"Yes, I knew you would get it. I knew."

"Have I?"

"It will be the most wonderful thing you have ever done."

They stayed there all day. They lunched under the beech trees, and H. H. became the H. H. of a month ago. But he became more than that; something had happened to him; his inward eyes had been given some new vision. Mary found him glancing at her in a queer, shy, wondering way.

"What wonderful hair you have," he said suddenly.

She went red to her throat.

"Have I?"

"Why, of course."

He sat, looking into the distance as though he had realized something that he had never realized before. Occasionally he painted women, idealized women, fitting them into some dream landscape.

"I say! Do you remember the Madonna of the Apple Blossom?"

Yes, she remembered it. A Cotton King had bought the picture and it hung somewhere in Lancashire.

"It was you. Why, of course it

was! How is it—I never thought of it before. And so was the Lady of Avalon."

She gave a strange little laugh.

"How wonderful! Now I am going to make tea."

H. H. did no more painting. They sat in the green shadows and watched the evening lights steal in. They talked, disconnectedly, shyly, like two people reaching for each other's hands in the dark. There were silences—shy, eloquent, mysterious silences—and when the twilight chided them home they walked, their free hands clasped together.

Outside Lignor a sudden delightful shyness seized them both.

"Let's take the field path."

"Yes—let's."

H. H. lifted the bicycles over the stile, but when they started again his arm was round Mary Vise's waist.

"Dear," he said, "I wish I wasn't so old."

"Old! You will never be old."

Now, as it so happened, eight young people were looking over the garden hedge, and they saw these two figures, intertwined, coming slowly through the dusk.

"Why—they are——"

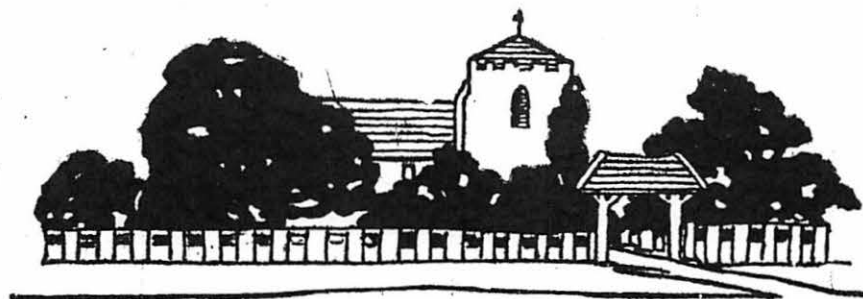
"Ssh!"

It was Ida the gentle who led them away and made them sit down round the gramophone.

"Dear thing! I'm so glad. She is worth the lot of us!"

No one started the gramophone. There was silence and the rising moon, and somewhere in the Queen's Head garden four young women fell upon Mary Vise and kissed her.

WARWICK DEEPING.



APRIL 1920 (9)
THE STORYTELLER

Blind Love

By Warwick Deeping

"Peter was sitting up, straight and rigid. The man in him was shocked . . .

"'I'm quite sure she's not ugly,' he said with white abruptness; 'I judge people by their voices.'"



NORAH LYTTLETON walked to the edge of the club-house terrace and stood looking down the green valley. It was one of those superb spring mornings when the dew lies long on the grass, and little clouds of mist hang pocketed in the deep woods and along the hollows of a stream. The larches were the colour of emerald; the Scotch firs had a blue bloom upon their needles; the domes of the beech trees had the sheen of green silk. It was a day that called to the youth in the heart of a woman, and to the adventure in the blood of a man.

And Norah Lyttleton was sad. She stood there in her green jersey and brown tweed skirt, her red hair shining in the sunlight, a plain woman whom romance had passed by—a woman whose heart cried out for it, the romance that had never been hers.

A man strolled up to her.

"Are you playing this morning?" She hardly turned her head.

"No; I'm going to knock round and practice my iron."

The man went away. He had only wanted a game with a woman who was an international and perhaps the finest woman golfer in the world. Norah Lyttleton was longing for that greater game, the game of life and of love and of children.

Two or three girls were standing on the steps of the club-house.

"Isn't she ugly!"

"Poor dear!"

"Quite hideous," said little Effie Carslake, who had a charming face and no heart.

And therein lay the pathos of it all, for this plain woman with romance in her heart and her unromantic face was envied by thousands. She was a great sports-woman; her name was known everywhere; you saw her photos in the magazines and papers; she had written a book; crowds followed when she played a match; enthusiasts watched her with awe, and imitated her shoelaces and the way she did her hair. Men called her "a jolly good sort," "a sport," "a pal," but no man had ever looked at her with the eyes of a lover.

Norah Lyttleton wandered down on to the course with her "iron" under her arm. She kept to the fringe of the fairway, throwing down a couple of balls and playing experimental shots in a perfunctory and listless fashion. She could not do anything wrong at the game, and her own facility bored her. It was so easy, so effortless, so utterly unsatisfying to the hunger at her heart.

"Dear God, shall I do this all my life?"

The beauty of that spring day had her in thrall. She picked up the two balls, wandered aimlessly, looking up at the great trees and the blue of the sky with the sadness of one who is very lonely. Men thought her a plain, obvious, good-natured sort of girl. She was neither obvious nor plain. The beauty lay hidden, an inarticulate beauty that hurt.

She sat down among some gorse bushes and dreamed. Bees were

Blind Love

busy; a vague breeze made a little murmur in the tops of the pines; it was very quiet and very still. Very few people were playing that morning, and Nature and Norah Lyttleton were together and alone.

"Isn't it strange," she thought, "that my only chance of self-expression seems to be hitting a ball? And I want something so different. I suppose that there are hundreds of people who think that I am quite happy. The idiots! If I were some little Cockney girl selling flowers, and with a baby wrapped up in a shawl!"

A mood of passionate impatience, of exasperation, ensued. She got up and went on, and throwing down the balls again, began to play wild and reckless shots along the edge of the fairway. She was trying to lose that facile skill of hers, mocking at it—this skill that other people envied.

She hit a ball into a clump of heather over the side of the hill below a wood of Scotch firs, and habit sent her in search of it. Mosses of brown were in bloom here, and under the Scotch firs bluebells spread a mist of blue. She could smell their faint perfume as she searched for the lost ball. And then, quite suddenly, she was aware of a man sitting at the edge of the fir wood, leaning against a tree. He had been hidden by a bush of broom, and she was very close to him.

She saw that he was blind.

"Who is that? Is it you, Clark?"

She stood and stared, unable to speak for a moment.

"No. I am looking for a lost ball."

"I beg your pardon," he said.

And then:

"I think I heard something fall—down there. I'm afraid I'm no use."

She sensed a note of pathos in his voice, and her heart answered it.

"The ball doesn't matter. Is there anything you want—I mean, anybody?"

"I thought it might be Clark, our gardener. He acts as my blind-man's

dog, and takes me out to sit in the sun, where I can smell things, the pines and those wild hyacinths. But one gets so lonely."

She obeyed a sudden impulse, and sat down close to him. His sightless face hurt her; it was so calm, yet so questioning, and so sad. She thought it a beautiful face, in spite of those closed eyelids and the scars.

"I'll rest here, if you don't mind?"

"Please do."

She saw that he was glad of her presence, and it thrilled her.

"Do you want to think? If so—I won't chatter."

"I get too much thinking. Sometimes—there is nothing else."

"Of course," she said; "it must be—"

She checked herself, sensing the warm sunlight and his craving for spiritual sunlight, that warm life that was so good and wholesome. It seemed kinder not to speak of morbid things—to drive his blind thoughts inwards.

"Can you smell the firs?"

"Yes, aren't they gorgeous? It's one of those golden days, isn't it?"

"Yes. A big blue sky, and dew everywhere, till the sun reached it. There's a big patch of yellow broom just in front of us."

"Is there?" he said; "Clark couldn't tell me that. He hasn't the eyes. I knew—used to know—nearly every tree in this place, before the war. Do you live here?"

"I am staying here for three months."

"Nothing but golfing women," he said; "women who play games. One might as well talk to a parrot. But I beg your pardon; perhaps you —"

She managed to laugh.

"I think I loathe golf," she said, "though I happen to be rather good at it."

"Of course. A woman could have a soul. Generalisations are such tosh. I wonder if you would tell me your name?"

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She hated her name as she told it him.

"Lyttleton — Norah Lyttleton. And yours?"

"The Norah Lyttleton?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I don't feel that you are—well, just that. I'm getting rather quick at sensing things."

"Thank you," she answered; "you haven't answered my question."

"My name? It doesn't matter much. I call myself Blind Peter. Lambert is the other part of it. I live up there with my aunt—that's to say, for the present. My people are dead. I sometimes wish— One's such an infernal nuisance, you know."

Her face softened and became almost beautiful.

"You mustn't say that. And I suppose I must be going."

She rose, for there was an emotion in her that cried out for solitude.

"Must you? I wonder if I shall see you again? Somehow—I do see you."

"Oh, I dare say. If talking amuses you—"

"It saves me from the hell of too much thinking. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said, touched to the deeps by the blind and asking smile he gave her.

Norah played no more golf that day, but passed it wandering alone in the pine woods of St. Dominic. She knew in her heart that the great thing had happened to her, and she was afraid, afraid of her own pity and tenderness, and of the heritage that had followed her poor, plain face. She had grown very sensitive. She had a horror of playing the part of the eager and assiduous fool, the sentimental fool whom other women pity or mock at. And yet that blind man in his loneliness seemed to call to her heart. "Most women were such parrots." Norah knew how wonderful and great a love she could give to a man.

She went out again next morning

and found him sitting there in the same place, on the edge of the wood of Scotch firs. In a moment she was a creature of panic, afraid of her own heart, tortured by a pathetic incredulity. She hesitated, walked on, hesitated again, turned back, looking about her with a sense of sensitive shame, seeing herself as the huntress too desperately eager in the pursuit.

"Good morning."

She waded through the heather. His blind face lit up and she saw that he was glad.

"Good morning, Miss Lyttleton."

"You know who it is, then?"

He had got up and was standing by the tree.

"Of course I know. It's your voice."

She blushed. She had rather a beautiful voice, but no one had ever told her so.

They sat down.

"Are you playing to-day?"

"No."

He hesitated, half shyly.

"You are not spoiling your morning for my benefit?"

"I'm thinking of giving up golf," she said.

"Giving it up!"

"Yes. It begins to strike me as rather futile, and rather selfish. The war taught one so much."

"Were you in the war?" he asked her.

"In a small way. I drove an ambulance in France. It was better than playing golf."

"Yes; there must be so much more in you," he said.

They sat there in the sunshine and talked, and she noticed that a subtle change showed itself in the man. He had been restless, feverish, in spite of a grim effort to appear calm, but all restlessness seemed to leave him. He began to talk to her as a man talks to the most intimate of friends, and yet with a touch of delightful shyness that gave her a sense of exultation, a trembling of the heart. No man had ever wanted to talk to her like this before. The

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intimacy of it was like a soft caress to her.

"I'm not boring you?" he asked her, almost anxiously.

"You could never bore me."

"You seem to understand things. So few people understand. They try to gush or give you platitudes, and you know it is just words—words. But I feel you—as I feel the sunlight."

Her head was bowed, her eyes full of a wonderful and tender humility.

"Perhaps I know what it is to feel lonely."

"You—lonely!"

"Yes."

"I can't understand how you can be lonely."

"It's true, all the same," she said.

He talked to her of the war, and her sympathy led him to speak of the "afterwards" and the present. She found that he had nothing but his pension, and no conceivable future save darkness and the little limited things that his blindness allowed. He hinted at his desperate loneliness, and at a boyish hunger for movement and the healthy strenuousness of life.

"I used to swim a lot. I feel I could go on a tramp's holiday and march my twenty miles a day. And I should like to dance again."

"Why shouldn't you dance?" she said.

"But who would want a blind partner?"

"There is a dance at the Tennis Club next week. Would you come as my partner?"

He flushed like a shy boy.

"It's too good of you. But shouldn't I be in the way?"

"Of course not."

"Then, I'm so rusty, and I don't know how I should shape."

"We could just drift into it. You could leave all the guiding to me."

"What a sportswoman you are!" he said, "and somehow I can't thank you as I want to thank you. A crock has not any rights—"

"You mustn't call yourself that, or I shall be angry."

They met every day in that same place, and that new comradeship had grown into a thing of subtle and unconfessed beauty when Effie Carslake discovered it. Effie Carslake was a heartless little beast with an immense and mischievous vanity, a charming little cad whom quite a number of fools wanted to marry. Her vanity was insatiable. And she was the victim of one of those strange, feminine hatreds. She was jealous of Norah, and with a jealousy that lusted to use its claws.

A coincidence of her own creating found her beating the heather with a mashie in that very place where Norah Lyttleton had met her innocent chance. Peter was there in the sunlight under the dark fringe of the firs. She pretended to discover him, and her voice was as soft as silk.

"Excuse me, but did you see a ball drop here in the heather?"

He looked surprised, for he had expected that other voice.

"I'm sorry, but I'm blind."

"How horrid of me," she said, "I ought to have noticed it. Aren't you Mr. Lambert?"

"Yes."

"I know your aunt; she told me how splendid you have been. It must be horrible to be blind."

She was snugly curled against a tree, the young woman in possession, when Norah came down the green slope of the fairway to the bank of heather below the firs. The boy and the girl were hidden from her by the lie of the ground and the broom bushes, and she did not see what had happened to Peter, until her feet touched the edge of the heather. She flushed, paused with the awkward abruptness of a sensitive woman taken by surprise, and then walked on.

Effie Carslake was smiling. She had scored off Norah. It was the plain woman who suffered.

"What a gawk!" she thought, "and she didn't even try to turn me out."

But Norah was angry, and her

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anger was against herself. She felt the humiliation of the thing, the shame of her own ineptitude, her sensitive cowardice under the cool eyes of that little chit. Her jealousy hurt her, for it seemed so mean and preposterous, an emotion that wounded her pride. There is no bitterness to equal the bitterness of a plain woman when she feels that she has been laughed at as a sentimental and over-eager fool.

Norah Lyttleton did not see Peter again till the night of the dance. She had kept away from the links and the pine woods of St. Dominic, and for two mornings Effie Carslake had held Norah's place, chattering to Blind Peter, "amusing the poor boy," as she called it. Peter had sat and listened with the patient yet expectant air of a dog waiting for someone to come and unfasten the chain. He wondered what had become of Norah, why she had deserted him so suddenly, and left this thin-voiced little chatterbox in her place.

Now on the night of the dance at the Tennis Club, Peter betrayed a quite extraordinary restlessness. He sat in a chair by the window and listened, getting up every now and again to fidget blindly about the room.

"Are you sure you ordered the cab?"

His aunt, a primly good-natured woman, looked at him with curiosity.

"Of course, dear."

"Then they must have forgotten."

Suddenly he heard the grinding of wheels on the drive, and his agitation died away.

"It's coming. Is my tie all right?"

"Quite, dear."

She wondered what had happened to Peter, but Peter knew.

People noticed that night that Norah Lyttleton was slightly flushed and that her eyes were very bright, and Effie Carslake understood.

"What's Norah looking so excited about?" she asked with the innocence of a child.

"Is she excited?"

"Perhaps it's a man."

Norah was sitting on a sofa near the door. She saw another man lead Peter into the room, Peter whose blind face seemed to be looking for someone.

"Is Miss Lyttleton here?"

"Yes."

He was led to her, and she rose to meet him, a woman who trembled, a woman who could hardly trust her voice.

"I wondered whether you would forget."

She guided him to the sofa, with a hand gently touching his shoulder.

"You can sit down—now."

Peter's face was as flushed as hers.

"Is it likely that I should forget? I haven't talked to you for three whole days."

"I couldn't come," she said vaguely, meeting the eyes of Effie Carslake, who was watching them from the other side of the room.

She felt the excitement in the man at her side. It thrilled her, frightened her, tortured her with the thought that it was not she who inspired it, but that little girl in the blue charmeuse dress and with eyes like cold blue glass.

The orchestra had begun to play a "one step" and people were beginning to dance.

"Would you like to try?" she asked him timidly.

"May I?"

"The room is not very crowded."

"I'll leave everything to you," he said with the sudden shyness of a lover.

He was a little awkward at first, but the very nearness of her, the touch of her hands seemed to give him confidence. He had been something of an expert in the days before the war, and he was sensitive, very sensitive to the woman who guided him. At the end of a minute they were combining splendidly, and Peter had lost his nervousness.

"Do you know, I feel as though I had danced with you always."

She laughed very softly,

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"I'm glad," she said.

Then there were developments that her imagination had not visioned. Peter Lambert became the central emotional figure of the evening, a blind boy with a strangely happy face, a boy who touched the hearts of the women. Norah lost him for a while after the second dance. She had been carried off by some golfing comrade, and her sensitive pride had accepted the digression. There were other girls who were ready to guide that blind boy round the room. He danced with one, but the dance was not a success. When Norah next saw him he was sitting out with Effie Carslake on that same sofa near the door.

Norah felt chilled. She could not bring herself to look again at the two.

Effie Carslake was chattering with an air of intimacy and with a voice that was softly and mischievously confidential.

"Poor Miss Lyttleton," she said suddenly; "she's having almost a good time to-night."

Peter stiffened, but Effie did not notice it.

"Why do you say that?"

"What?"

"Poor Miss Lyttleton."

Effie made their nearness a little more intimate.

"Why, she's so—ugly. Men never bother about her. But what a little beast I am!"

Peter was sitting up, straight and rigid. The man in him was shocked, but not in the way that Effie Carslake had intended.

"I'm quite sure she's not ugly," he said with white abruptness; "I judge people by their voices."

Effie tittered. She had no soul to gauge the almost fierce seriousness of the boy's antagonism.

"What sort of voice?"

"She has the most beautiful voice in the world," said Peter quite calmly, "and to me—it makes her beautiful."

He got up, and went wandering out blindly into the room, leaving

Effie Carslake to recover from that lover's snub. A dance was just ending, and Peter stood still, a little lost and bewildered in the movement about him.

"Peter."

Norah had seen him break away from Effie Carslake, and she had come to his rescue. He turned sharply at the sound of her voice, and held out a child's hand.

"You see—I get lost without you."

She took his hand, and with a new pride and a little inward cry of exultation.

"I did not know that I was necessary."

"I can't dance with anybody else."

"Oh?"

"I don't want to dance—unless—"

She was leading him to a far corner where there was an empty settee.

"Which way are we going?" he asked her suddenly.

"Does it matter?"

"I want to be kept away from that little beast with the ugly voice."

"Effie Carslake?"

"Yes—that's her name—I think. She's ugly and she's evil."

Norah could not speak for a moment. Her eyes were full of a strange light.

"You are wrong," she said; "Effie Carslake is the prettiest girl in the room."

She guided him to the settee. He sat down and seemed to be struggling to say something.

"I'm so helpless," he began.

"People think they can take possession of me and keep me in a corner. They bore me or hurt me, and I can't escape. You say that girl is pretty—but to me—she is ugly—repulsive."

"How do you know?"

"Her voice. And I feel people—I have a sort of blind sense. That's—that's why I know you are beautiful."

She hung her head.

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"O—my dear—I'm not. I'm—I'm ugly."

Peter put out a shy hand and touched her. He sat very still and silent for a moment, but his face was the face of a lover.

"It's impossible," he said at last; "you couldn't be ugly. You're—you're the most beautiful thing in the world. O—what am I saying—blind, useless idiot that I am—only a bother to everyone!"

"You're not useless," she answered in a voice that was ready to break. "Oh—I want to dance with you—dear. Didn't we come here together to be happy?"

"Dancing with you is heaven," he said, "but how can I dare to think of it as more than—just a dance?"

"Let it be just a dance to-night. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow I will play the man," he said; "I have suffered enough to know how it should be done."

Peter did not sleep much that night, for his heart was full of yearning that would not be satisfied. He was in torment, held to witness by a white-faced sincerity that would not suffer him to shirk its questions. How could he tell Norah that he loved her, ask her to marry a helpless thing that could not earn his daily bread? He had his pension. It was little enough for a lone man.

He asked to be taken down next morning to his favourite seat under the Scotch firs, and there he sat and waited. He felt that Norah would

come, and he was in despair in what he had to say to her. The words of the blind honour were like painful beats of the heart.

Presently he heard her footsteps in the heather; he felt her there—this woman of the beautiful voice and of the warm, sensitive body—this woman who understood. He went white. His mouth was dry. He could not utter a word.

"Am I late?"

She sat down close to him, and of a sudden she felt that he was trembling—that he could not speak. His face showed blind anguish. His right hand grasped helplessly—its fingers touching the ground.

"Peter——"

And then his strength gave way.

"O—what a weak fool I am! I ought not to have come here—I'm a cad——"

She caught that hand of his and held it.

"Tell me—you must—I want you to."

"O, my darling—I love you; I—I——"

She drew him to her like a mother, and they clung together, his hands resting against her shoulder.

"O, my dear, do you want me?"

"More than my eyes, more than my sight. Do you know that I wanted to die. But now——"

"I am going to be your eyes," she said, "your happy eyes, for ever and ever. You shall have a man's life, dear, a career. We will find it together."

WARWICK DEEPING.

Published March 20

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The Face that Did Not Fade

By Warwick Deeping

"... I wonder how many times I have been in love! And that is why I am a bachelor and shall remain so. I'm what the common crowd calls fickle. I know that I shall be attracted by a different woman—every few months. It is sad, but it is true."

"She was silent a moment. Then she said:

"Why are you telling me this?"

"There is such a thing as honesty, though it is very hard—on occasions—to be honest. Nature may be dragging the other way. . . ."



WOMEN fell in love with Richard Cavendish, perhaps because he was a very charming person, a man who had admired so many women that he had never persuaded himself to marry any particular woman. People who met him casually took him to be a naval officer. There was a clear-cutness about him, a frankness, a happy courtesy, a shrewd sense of humour that characterise the fine gentlemen of the Senior Service. Cavendish had travelled much, published volumes of poems and a play, written articles for the *Nineteenth Century*, but he had utterly refused to dabble in politics. He was a man of the world and a sportsman.

The Varneys expected Cavendish at Heatherstoke, and the women discussed him in the loggia.

"Well, I do think he might have married Vi Charteris last summer."

"But why—"

"They were in love with each other. I watched them."

"Call it a flirtation. I think Richard Cavendish behaved quite well; he always behaves well. The man is a charming cynic. Most women don't understand him."

"He amuses himself, you mean, at the expense—"

"Not in the least. He cannot

help it, and the women run after him. But I have known Richard Cavendish a good many years, and I have never seen him make a little girl unhappy. If a woman can handle her weapons, Cavendish will fence with her; it is just sport."

Iris Varney laughed.

"And the men like him. Are you feeling shocked, Honour?"

A girl of three-and-twenty, who was lying back in a lounge chair and watching the sunset, looked at Iris Varney with grave eyes.

"I don't like frivolous men."

"Oh, you dreamer! Our friend Mr. Cavendish could hardly be called frivolous."

"Honour has ideals."

"Is it the strong, silent man, child?"

The girl sat up and leant her elbows on her knees.

"Why do people laugh at ideals?"

"We don't, dear, but we know how dangerous they are. I would never marry a man who had ideals."

"Mrs. Parbury!"

"You see, I'm a wicked old world-wise cynic. I married a man who had passed through the mumps and measles and ideals period. We get on very well together."

Iris Varney was watching Honour Millburn. She frowned meaningly at Grace Parbury, and Mrs. Parbury accepted the suggestion.

"How one talks," she said, "Let's go down to the lake, Honour, and look at the lilies."

"I should love it."

The Face that Did Not Fade

"You dear, sweet, Maeterlinckish thing! You must not forget that Mr. Cavendish is a poet."

Richard Cavendish arrived next day in time for tea, a tall man with alert blue eyes, and fair hair growing grey over the temples. He happened to find himself in a chair next Honour Millburn, and they talked about Rossetti, and the plays of Stephen Phillips. There was an aloofness about Honour that puzzled Cavendish. It was not shyness, but a kind of watchful mistrust. He was amused.

Mrs. Parbury carried him off to play croquet.

"I insist on your being unselfish until to-morrow. I'll give you three bisques—"

"And a beating. How is Varney?"

"As difficult as ever. I think Iris is a saint."

"Too much so. Why doesn't she send him round the world once a year. By the way, are we going to toss, or will you begin? I hate this game, you know, really; I merely play because a very charming lady—"

"No parleying with the enemy, Richard; I am out for your blood. I suppose you are going fishing—next month?"

"Yes, I have taken a piece of water down at Quarridge."

"Quarridge! That's Honour Millburn's place."

"The young lady with the 'What-are-you-doing-for-the-soul-of-the-race' eyes?"

"Exactly."

"I think she disapproves of me—for some reason."

"It shows her penetration. Now when are you going to hit that ball?"

"Immediately. There you are! Now I am at your mercy. A man who thinks of marrying should always watch a woman play croquet."

"Why?"

"Because it should disabuse him of all those foolish notions about the soft, yielding tenderness of the

feminine soul. You see the real woman when she is playing croquet. Hard, efficient little creatures, quite capable of hustling a man all over the earth, and looking so pleasant about it."

"Shut up. I want to make this hoop."

Two days passed, and Richard Cavendish showed himself flippant, clever, and wholly amusing. He teased Mrs. Parbury outrageously, played tennis with Varney and beat him, taught old Sir Mark Merioneth how to drive his own car, laughed young Jack Hazel out of a fit of the blues. He spoke hardly six words to Miss Millburn, yet they caught each other in the act of making interested criticisms. Their eyes flashed cross-questions. "What are you?" "And you?" When two people avoid each other, challenge each other with silence, it is as likely as not that a romance is in the air.

It might never have happened but for that dog, and the servants being late with breakfast. Iris Varney's rough-haired terrier contrived to get its fore-paw crushed under the wheel of the luggage cart, and arrived on the terrace yelping dolefully. And Honour Millburn, bundling up her hair in a hurry and running downstairs with eyes full of pity, found Cavendish rendering first aid in the loggia, with a couple of handkerchiefs, Jeyes' fluid, and a basin of water.

Her whole appreciation of Cavendish changed dramatically when she saw him handling that dog. The beast just lay on his knees with supreme confidence, while Cavendish's hands dealt with that crushed paw. He was very gentle, and he was talking to the dog as though it were a child.

He looked up and met Honour's eyes.

"Poor Buller has begun the day badly."

She smiled at him mysteriously.

"Is the leg broken?"

"I don't think so. There is a cut here—"

She put her comely head down close to his.

"Poor Buller; poor old boy."

"Now for a nice wash, doggie. That's it."

"I'll hold the basin?"

"Thank the kind lady, Buller."

Buller winked a shrewd eye at her.

So between them they dressed the dog's foot, and at the same time established a sudden intimacy that threatened to be serious. Honour was an impulsive young woman, with her quick colour and the tinge of red in her hair. Her sensitiveness had made her gauche as a young girl, but now it was lending a kind of ardent glitter to her beauty.

"Why do men pretend to be frivolous and flippant?"

"Are you asking me a personal question, Miss Millburn?"

She flushed slightly.

"I think I disliked you till I saw you helping Buller. You gave such a false impression."

"And now, because I tied up a dog's paw, you think me a serious and admirable man?"

"There are different ways of doing things."

He looked at her with quick interest.

"And different ways of seeing things. A man of my age should have developed a feeling of goodwill to all small creatures and women."

"You talk as though you were quite old."

"Forty next birthday."

"I don't like boys; they are so raw," she said with suggestive irrelevancy.

Now Jack Hazel happened to be in love with her, and for the next three days he was the most unhappy youth imaginable. Honour had lost all interest in him, and showed it. She was interested in someone else, and that someone was also interested in her.

Jack confided in Iris Varney.

"I knew Cavendish makes the average chap look a raw ass, but I

was getting on quite well with Honour before he came. Don't you think it is rather rough luck on me, Mrs. Varney?"

She soothed him.

"You see, Mr. Cavendish is a very unusual man. You couldn't blame any woman for being interested in him. It is quite harmless."

"Oh, is it!" exclaimed the melancholy Jack, and then looked as though he wanted to kick himself.

"Well, he is going on Thursday."

"And I have to leave on Friday."

"Stay over the week-end."

"May I?"

"Of course."

"Thanks awfully. You are a sportswoman. It may make all the difference."

But it didn't.

On the Thursday Richard Cavendish said good-bye to Heatherstoke, and motored on to Quarridge for a fortnight's fishing. He was a gentleman, and he had recognised certain well-marked symptoms in himself, and he did not tell Miss Millburn that he was going to Quarridge. He saw no reason for surrendering his fishing, provided the girl remained at Heatherstoke, where she might rediscover an interest in Master Jack Hazel.

But Honour Millburn happened to know of Cavendish's visit to Quarridge, and she thought his silence particularly delicate and chivalrous. Women dream out all sorts of romantic situations, and Honour dreamed a sensitive meaning into Cavendish's silence. He had left the initiative with her, had courteously surrendered to her the right of choice.

Cavendish put up at "The Crown" at Quarridge, a noted inn well beloved of all good sportsmen. He settled himself down there with his man Gibbs, full of a comfortable sense of having behaved honestly, yet piqued by a pleasant melancholy that had followed him from Heatherstoke. The weather was superb, and Cavendish went down daily to the bit of stream he had rented, where the brown water flashed in the sun,

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light and the valley meadows were all gold. He left Gibbs at "The Crown," for Cavendish was a man who could enjoy being alone.

He did almost as much meditating as he did fishing, sitting in the lush grass or under a white thorn, with the oak woods green against the blue, and all the world running open-armed towards June. Snatches of song played in Cavendish's head. His eyes had a soft melancholy, and his smile was the smile of the seer.

"After all, everything is a matter of perfume," he said to himself, "or beautiful vibrations. Why should one want to clutch at a woman and keep her for oneself? I think I have learnt to be honest with nature."

But he did not realise that he would have to be even more honest.

Cavendish was whipping a likely stretch of water one evening when she descended on him like a spirit out of heaven, treading the meadow path that skirted the edge of a wood. Her eyes had a happy serenity. She had been dreaming. She imagined that he had been hoping, waiting, and that her coming would herald the climax of his life. She knew that he cared; she did not know how often he had cared before.

"I'm afraid I am spoiling your sport."

Cavendish had not heard her footsteps in the grass. He was astonished, posed, but he was gentleman enough to betray nothing but a charmed surprise.

"Miss Millburn! This is delightful. It would be impossible for you to spoil anything."

He knew that he loved her; the sight of her, and the sound of her voice had set his blood thrilling. And it was in no caddish spirit that he more than suspected her of being a child of the Spring.

"I thought you were still at Heatherstoke."

Her grave eyes did not avoid his. "No. I left there yesterday. I wanted to be home again. You see, I'm the responsible person at home."

"My lady of the manor?"

"Mother is an invalid, and I look after everything."

"I see."

Cavendish had wound up his line and laid his rod on the grass. Fishing was at an end for the moment; he forefelt much more serious problems.

"You never told me you were coming here?"

"Well, I did not expect you to be here."

Her grave eyes glimmered sensitive approval.

"I think it was rather subtle of you. By the way, Buller's leg is quite well."

"I'm glad of that."

"Have you had good sport?"

"Excellent. I suppose I am fishing your river. The agent—"

"Oh, yes; we own the Quarridge for five miles. I do quite a lot of fishing, but I am never quite sure of my flies. It's such an art."

He wanted to say all sorts of impulsive boyish things to her, but he held himself back. She was quite the most attractive feminine thing he had ever seen, but then—he knew himself too well. As a man of the world he had learnt to hide his perennial youth behind an air of benignant fatherliness.

"I hope you will come and call on us."

"May I?"

"Of course. We haven't any men folk to meet you."

"I shall not break my heart over that."

She smiled at him frankly, girlishly, and chose to remember that she had come out with a purpose.

"I am going to see an old servant of ours who lives down the valley. I hope I haven't lost you a fish. Good-bye."

Cavendish took off his hat to her.

"Good-bye. I shall call on your mother to-morrow."

"Yes; we shall be in."

Richard Cavendish did no more fishing.

"Confound it," he thought, "what

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a fool I am! Well, I am going to do the straight thing—if necessary."

Honour went on her way, quite happy.

"I like him," she reflected; "he is so clever, so restrained."

Cavendish called on the Millburns, and found Quarridge Hall as romantic as Honour herself. They had tea on the terrace overlooking the gardens and the wooded valley and the brown Quarridge shimmering through the green. Mrs. Millburn was frail, elegant, a great reader. Cavendish charmed her into a mood of animation; she looked quite flushed and pretty when he had gone.

"What a delightful man, dear."

"I thought you would like him, mother. He pretends to be flippant, but underneath——"

"Sensitive people are always on the defensive."

In the course of a few days the romance threatened such dramatic developments that Cavendish had to take himself seriously in hand. He was in love with Honour, and he more than suspected that she was in danger of loving him.

"Let us be honest and thorough—for once," he said to himself. "I'm afraid I have made one or two women miserable in my time, just because I happen to be an impressionable fool. The child shall be disillusioned."

He went fishing on that fatal evening, and they met in one of those lush meadows on the banks of the Quarridge. The light in her eyes made Cavendish feel very guilty, and yet it was no fault of his that Nature had made him strangely attractive to women.

"This is my last evening."

"Is it? I thought you were staying."

"I have been called back to town. You see, I am a trustee for all sorts of people. They appear to think that a middle-aged and confirmed bachelor has nothing to do."

She did not let the statement pass, and he had hoped that she would challenge it.

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"You do amuse me. You seem to think yourself so decrepit."

"I am very ancient in wisdom, child. I happen to know myself, which is a serious advantage. Supposing you come and watch me fish?"

"I shall spoil your sport."

"It will end in my doing no fishing. But we shall talk, and I am a great talker."

They turned towards the river, and sat down under cover of some thorn bushes close to the bank. Cavendish made no attempt to get out his tackle. He lay prone, with his chin on his hands, and stared at the water.

"What are you going to talk about?" she asked him.

"The obvious thing, myself."

"It should be interesting."

"Humiliating—to me. Do you think you know anything about men, Honour?"

She looked gravely at her own hands.

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because there happen to be all sorts of men, and yet they are very much alike. You can label me a man with a temperament; I'm quicksilver. I always have to be moving. I'm what you call keenly impressionable."

"You love beautiful things."

"Exactly. But I like variety, change, the eternally different. And what are beautiful things? Pictures, landscapes, flowers—women."

She looked at him sharply, and then glanced away.

"You call women—things?"

"Very subtle, exquisite entities. I wonder how many times I have been in love! And that is why I am a bachelor, and shall remain so. I'm what the common crowd calls fickle. I know that I shall be attracted by a different woman—every few months. It is sad, but it is true."

She was silent a moment. Then she said:

"Why are you telling me this?"

"There is such a thing as honesty, though it is very hard—on occasions

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—to be honest. Nature may be dragging one the other way. Of course it does not concern you, child, but somehow, I feel able to tell you the truth. A man gets tired of living with his own temperamental frailties and never talking about them to anyone."

She hung her head and plucked at the grass with restless fingers.

"Are all men—like you?"

"Do you want me to tell the truth?"

"Of course."

"Most of them. Personally, I don't believe in marriage; at least, for myself. I should be wanting to— Oh, well, there it is! Some men make a success of it; they dull their souls, and smother their restlessness by keeping dogs, gardening, playing golf, collecting postage stamps, sitting on committees, running the parish fire brigade. I can't smother my wretched vitality, and so I shall never take root."

"I suppose some women are like that, too?"

"I suppose so, only we English refuse to recognise facts."

She raised her head and managed to smile at him.

"How quaint—and nice of you to confide in me. I—do—appreciate honesty. So I suppose you will go on looking at picture after picture, always finding a new one to make you forget the last?"

"It's my fate," he said.

"And nothing would alter it?"

He smiled.

"Some gross lesion, as the doctors call it, might upset the rhythm. I might lose my sight, for instance—"

"Oh, don't!" she exclaimed. "What a horrible alternative!"

Richard Cavendish found it more difficult for him to forget Honour Millburn than he imagined. As a man of the world he had expected the vividness of her to melt out of his mind in a few weeks, but this dimming of her picture did not happen. She haunted him as no other woman had ever haunted him.

He even began to wonder whether his multifarious experiences had deceived him, whether there was not some particular woman born to queen it over him, whether the romantic people had not gained some glimmerings of the truth.

And then Fate struck Cavendish that ironical blow. He went North in September for some shooting, and within a week he was stone blind. The careless handling of a gun by a man who had lunched unwisely and too well, shut out the light of day for ever from Richard Cavendish's eyes.

The shock to such a sensitive worldling in the prime of his manhood was tragical, and for a time he was a broken man. A sudden black loneliness seemed to descend upon him. He discovered that he did not belong to anybody; people were very kind, but their kindness was like the casual murmuring of a wind in the trees. He wanted to be touched, to feel warm, clinging hands holding his.

And in that new darkness there was one face that remained vividly before him, the face of Honour Millburn, the face of the last woman whom he had loved. It was like the last flash of light leaving a memory of beauty and brilliance behind it. What a fool he had been! How Fate must have laughed at him! Yet in a sense he felt that ironical justice had been dealt out to him; he had followed the eternal lure; he had desired impermanency, to end as a blind man groping in the dark.

Did she know? He wondered.

Cavendish had been blind for three months before Honour Millburn knew of it. A letter from Iris Varney gave her the news.

"Isn't it sad about poor Richard Cavendish. Some idiot shot him when they were out after partridges, and he is quite blind. Not disfigured, they tell me; a few pellets entered each eye."

Honour Millburn bowed down her head over that letter. The coin-

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vidence seemed so astonishing, so pathetic. She wondered whether he remembered. There was no resentment in her heart, only a love that respected itself, and a great pity.

It was winter, yet she went down and walked through the Quarridge meadows, where the grass was rank and grey, and the trees bare and grim. She thought of that gay, debonair man who had had the courage to tell her the truth, even at the expense of making her think him contemptible. He had mocked at himself to save her from dreaming a dream.

She stood and looked at the black water.

"Does he think of that day?" she asked herself. "I wonder if I shall ever see him again."

The winter passed and the spring came, and Richard Cavendish felt it in his blood. He was living alone in his flat in town, with his man Gibbs to nurse and valet him, and even to manage his affairs. Each day, when it was fine, Cavendish was driven out into Hyde Park, and his car left him to wander up and down on Gibbs's arm. Often he would sit alone in the sun near the water, listening to the little prattle of the miniature waves when a wind was blowing, to the voices of the children playing, and the shouts of the boys sailing their boats. And day after day another scene would rise in his memory, the woods and meadows and the Quarridge river and the noise of the water running towards the sea.

At last an inspiration came to him.

"Wire 'The Crown' at Quarridge, Gibbs, and see if they can take us in. I want the smell of the real country."

A week later the folk of Quarridge saw a blind man being led through the village and down the lane to the river meadows. Gibbs, the valet, carried a light deck-chair under one arm, while his other arm was linked in his master's.

"Put it close to the river, Gibbs.

I like the sound of the running water."

"It's a beautiful day, sir."

"I can feel the sun warm on me. You needn't wait, Gibbs. Come back in a couple of hours."

Gibbs looked at him a little anxiously. It would be easy for a blind man who was tired of life to throw himself into the river.

"You will be all right, sir?"

"Quite, Gibbs. I am not going to drown myself. Don't worry."

News travels quickly in a village, and in a day or two it had reached the inmost sanctuary of Quarridge Hall. Honour heard it, with a face that paled and eyes full of mysterious thoughts.

Next day she went down through the woods to the river and saw the blind man sitting there all alone in the sunlight. She drew near over the grass, so near that he heard the sound of her footsteps.

"Is that you, Gibbs?"

"No, it is I. Do you know the voice?"

"Honour!"

"Yes."

She sat down on the bank beside him and looked up into his face. He seemed to be struggling with some sudden emotion; his eyes were open, and but for a faint greyness dotted over them, they looked like the eyes of a man who could see.

"You don't know how sorry I am. How quick of you to remember my voice."

"Your face is almost as vivid a memory. Tell me, child, did you know that I was here?"

"Yes."

"And you came. How generous. And it is nearly a year ago. I am not the man I was then."

She was silent a moment.

"I wondered whether—you would come here again."

"You wondered?"

He bent towards her.

"Why?"

"It seemed so strange what you told me, and the tragic thing that happened to you. What you must have suffered."

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"Suffered! Yes. And yet—there are compensations. I have one memory instead of many, and I am remaining true to that memory. Let's talk of other things, Honour."

That was but the first day of many, and Richard Cavendish began a new and bitter struggle with his own soul. The face of this girl glowed like a bright light in his memory; all other faces seemed to melt away; her voice caressed him; her presence was like the sweet smell of the spring.

"I can't," he said to himself; "it mustn't happen; it would be blackguardly. Even if she cared——"

But Honour thought differently. If she had loved the man of wit and gaiety, she loved this blind and lonely man much more fiercely. She had that fine passion that must spend itself. Cavendish was so helpless, and she loved his helplessness.

"I wonder if you remember my face?" she asked him.

"I have never forgotten it."

"That means—yes. So nothing—intervened?"

He sat stiffly in his chair and tried to fight against the enchantment.

"I am not asking to be pitied, child."

"What a sensitive sense of honour you have."

"I'll not argue——"

"What is the use of arguing."

You told me once that you would never marry because you were too fickle. I am not going to marry—unless—— Well, you may guess."

He refused to guess, and they nearly quarrelled. Then Cavendish spoke out with desperate frankness.

"If you must be told—well, I love you; I loved you last year, and it is final. But if you think I am going to marry you—you are wrong. It would be a cad's trick, to let you take pity on the wreck of a man, a fellow who, when he was sound——"

"Dick, how utterly foolish!"

"It's not. I shall go back to town."

"Will you! Supposing——"

She stood behind him, and, bending over him, put her soft hands over his eyes.

"Supposing I want—what you call the wreckage? How utterly shameful of you—making me talk like this!"

"Honour!"

"Oh, my dear——"

He caught her hands, drew them down and kissed them. His voice sounded broken.

"I oughtn't to let you do it. It's damnable——"

"No, it's love."

Richard Cavendish humbled himself.

"Women give, men take," he said, "but what you have given me—I shall hold—till death."

WARWICK DEEPING.



Competition Corner

We again make an offer of two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the competitors who send in the titles of the six stories they like best in order of merit. The prizes will be awarded to those whose cards most nearly coincide with the votes of the majority of the competitors. Address, "Vote," THE STORY-TELLER, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C.4, and send in by September 2nd, 1917.

This month we have pleasure in awarding the First Prize of Two Guineas to:

DRIVER BEN WILLIAMS, 34054, Royal Field Artillery, No. 1 Section, 12th D.A.C., B.E.F., France.

The Second Prize of One Guinea goes to:

MRS. CLARK, Kyrie, Batheaston, Bath.

JULY 1919 (11)
THE STORY TELLER

The Portrait

By Warwick Deeping

" . . . She saw the face of Gaston de Gibas sneering at her as it sneered in the portrait, an amused and cruel face, dissolute, contemptuous.

"What are women for?" it asked her.

"And her love woke at the challenge, and held up its head with passionate defiance."



It hung in the dining-room of the château, that portrait, and Yvonne hated it, and her fear was as great as her hate.

The portrait was of a man in a coat of green and gold, a man with a long, sneering face and smiling, dissolute eyes. This Gaston de Gibas had died over a hundred years ago, but his face lived again in Raoul, Yvonne's husband, a face such as Gaston's might have been before he grew cynical and cruel.

And Raoul de Gibas was beginning to yawn. He was good natured, easy, impetuous, something of a blind fool, and his young wife loved him with a love that was pathetically wise.

"I must buy a new horse," he would exclaim over the dinner-table. "Firefly is getting too tame. He hasn't fought me for a month."

Yvonne would smile, but with a heart that was heavy. Raoul was always wanting a new horse or a new dog, some fierce beast whose spirit had to be broken, an adventure that would give him excitement.

"Please don't be fickle, Raoul."

"Fickle! Nonsense. I like a little danger, zest in my sport—that's all. One cannot be nothing but a farmer."

She smiled and sighed, wondering whether he had begun to find her tame, whether he desired to go hunting after some other mate.

"Besides"—and he glanced at the portrait on the wall—"old Gaston was the best swordsman and rider of his day. You are always declaring—"

"I do not wish you to be like Gaston," she said simply.

"And why not? He was a little fierce at times."

"I have watched that face, Raoul, and studied it. It is the face of a man who did cruel things; a man who wounded the souls of people."

He jumped up laughing.

"My sweet—but am I cruel?"

She did not answer his question directly.

"I want you to be happy, Raoul. Gaston's face is not the face of a man who was happy. I wish you would have the portrait taken away."

"Why?"

"Because it is so like you, and yet not so like you."

"All the more reason for keeping it, child; I should be able to judge how I ought not to look."

Happy indeed! Other people thought Raoul de Gibas a very lucky fellow. Did he not own the Château de Gibas, grey, mellow, and beautiful in its smother of spring orchard blossom? And the high woods of Gibas, and the great green valley with its river and lush meadows. He had money. He spent three months each year in Paris. As to his wife—well, many men had loved Yvonne, loved her for her dear frank eyes, that beautiful gold-brown hair of hers, that mouth with its wistful-pleading upper lip. And she was clever, so clever that she could hide her cleverness. The dew of youth

The Portrait

and tenderness and dreams was still in her eyes, and now a watching sadness had made her more beautiful.

For Yvonne was pretending to be blind. A year, two years, she had striven to make life gay for her man, shared in his interests, humoured his whims. He had never guessed how dearly she had moulded her life to his. She had wanted a child, too, but no child had come—as yet.

For months now she had watched, seen many things, said nothing. Her dread of his likeness to that portrait—grew. He became kind to her, studiously kind, and behind it she saw the beginning of little disloyalties, triflings with other women. It hurt her horribly. And yet she kept her smile for him, and her true eyes. He was just a fool boy still, attracted to novelty, thinking any pretty woman desirable because she was strange. He had not learnt the great lesson, that no more blessed thing can happen to a man than that he should fall in love with his wife once and for ever.

Then the spring came, and Yvonne, walking in the Gibas Woods, came upon Raoul's horse—Firefly—tied to a tree. A green "ride" sloped from the woods down towards the little town of Tours. She could see the red roofs of Tours—but something more immediate and compelling moved in that green woodland way, the figures of a woman and a man, and the man was Raoul, her husband.

Yvonne shrank back till she was hidden in the underwood, and watched this tragic interplay with the eyes of a frightened child. The pair turned and passed quite close to her, and Yvonne knew the woman for Lucrèce Beauregard, the daughter of a shopkeeper of Tours, a handsome young wench with the brain of a sheep, very vain and frivolous, a thing that bleated and ran away.

"You are very charming—you know, Lucrèce."

"O—la—la! I think you are a wicked man—Monsieur Raoul."

"Nonsense. Just a little flirtation on the road. I'm a robber, Lucrèce, and I say 'Stand and deliver.'"

The girl giggled—one forefinger in her mouth.

"Then I shall not come this way again, Monsieur."

"Ah—but you will. You wouldn't be so hard-hearted."

They passed out of hearing, and Yvonne slipped away through the woods. She felt humiliated with the bitter humiliation of a generous nature that loathes deceit and the slime of any secret track. But she was angry too, angry with the anger of an aristocrat and of a woman who was very proud.

"Fool."

Her eyes flashed out, and she breathed fast with passion.

"Fool—beloved fool!" she thought; "to run after a trumpery thing like that! What has she that I cannot give you a thousand times more dearly?"

She sat down under the great beech tree and wept, the slow, rare tears of a brave nature. Her world seemed in ruins, that beautiful world with its apple blossom and its green leaves, its stately quiet, its dreams of children. All the goodness had gone out of life. She imagined nothing but treachery and little sordid disloyalties, scorn of herself, scorn of the man she loved.

Then in that green woodland light she saw the face of Gaston de Gibas sneering at her as it sneered in the portrait, an amused and cruel face, dissolute, contemptuous.

"What are women for?" it asked her.

And her love woke at the challenge, and held up its head with passionate defiance.

"For better things than that," she said aloud; "he shall not be like you. I swear it."

Yvonne went back to the château with the calm of one who has taken a sacred vow, and when Raoul came riding up between the apple trees he found her waiting on the terrace for him, as though the woods of

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Gibas held no secret. In fact, she had a strange and plaintive curiosity in seeing how this man of hers would return to her.

Raoul appeared to be in the best of tempers.

"Holloa—*ma petite*; it is hot to-day. Firefly is sweating."

"Have you ridden far?"

"Oh—I went round St. Jean, and let Firefly have a gallop over the common."

She knew it to be a lie, and that he hurt her as no words of his had ever hurt her before. She arranged to smile down at him, and the smile in her eyes was like love burning.

"I will send for some red wine, or would you rather have cider?"

"Let it be cider," he said, stroking Firefly's neck. "Hollo, Pierre, come and take the horse to the stable."

All that evening Yvonne watched her husband as though he were a stranger, but Raoul was not conscious of being watched. Life had a new zest. He enjoyed his wine and his dinner, teased Yvonne like a brother, lit a cigar, strolled up and down, made her sing him sentimental songs. His voice joined hers as she sat at the piano, and his singing hurt her, and roused in her heart a feeling of pity, almost of scorn. He sang because a red-faced girl had made eyes at him. The real love was blind.

That night Yvonne de Gibas lay awake, thinking, and in the night a new inspiration came to her, and with it a new strength. It was necessary that this man of hers should be taught a lesson—shown his own face in the mirror of truth. He needed humbling. A woman who was weak, a woman who whimpered or who lived only to humour his whims would never save Raoul de Gibas from growing like Gaston of the dissolute eyes.

At breakfast next morning she made her first move in the game that was to be played, with her man's love as the stake.

"I have been thinking, Raoul, that

it is five months since I was at St. Jean"—St. Jean was her old home—"I shall go there for a month."

She watched him closely, hungering for some unwillingness on his part, some little touch of tenderness that would make her feel that she would be missed. But he patronised the suggestion, welcomed it too readily with a crass and sententious good nature.

"Of course, *ma petite*, they will be overjoyed to see you. Go—by all means. It is always good for one to have a change."

Two hours later she was talking to old Lawyer Delaroche, of Tours, sitting in that quiet office of his with its windows overlooking the churchyard and the grey cobbled "Place." She was very quiet, very serious, and old Delaroche, with his white head and shrewd kind eyes, listened and gazed at her with admiration.

"Yes—I can keep a secret. But it is amazing that all this should be necessary. I could thrash the young man—"

"Love is a scourge, my friend—"

"A scourge! In this case, I should have called it paradise."

She smiled at him sadly, but gratefully.

"So you will arrange to take 'The Hermitage' for me at once, under the name of Madame Le Plessiel. You can make as much of a mystery of it as you like."

"But—'The Hermitage'! What melancholy!"

"The Hermitage" was in truth a melancholy place, one of those forlorn, faded, unhappy houses with the reputation of being haunted. Something had happened there many years ago. For years it had been empty, desolate, deplorable, a solitary place hidden in the tangle of wild shrubberies and gardens. A labourer and his wife lived in the kitchen and the room over it. All the windows were shuttered; the rain, leaking from the broken gutters, had stained the walls. It stood by itself in a lonely valley off the road from Tours to Paradis, about

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three miles from the Château or Gibas.

"You mean to live there, Madame?"

"For a month."

"But there is no furniture."

"I shall need little. My old Jeanette will be with me. And surely, Monsieur Delaroche, you could arrange to purchase or hire a little furniture in Tours, for your new client, furniture for two bedrooms, a sitting-room, a kitchen, furniture of the plainest. Your new client has money—but she is a woman of mystery. You understand?"

"Of course it can be done. My dear lady, my heart and services are yours. I will arrange everything. The man and his wife shall leave at once. In a week—Madame Le Plessiel can arrive. But how will you feed yourself, and yet remain a mystery?"

"I shall arrange that with Jeanette and her husband. They will be in my secret. I can trust Jeanette as though she were my mother."

Monsieur Delaroche bent his white head to her.

"And is there nothing else that I can do?"

Her frank eyes lit up with a flash of pathetic humour.

"Yes—say that this Madame Le Plessiel is rather charming. If you whispered that in Tours, would it be too gross a lie?"

"For once Tours would hear but half the truth," he said.

Ten days hence Pierre, Jeanette's husband, who was Raoul de Gibas' groom, began to gossip.

"The Hermitage' is taken, Monsieur."

"The Hermitage'? Pst! By whom?"

"I haven't heard her name, Monsieur. She seems something of a mystery—but Paul Garoflos, who saw her in Tours outside old Delaroche's house, swears she is young and very beautiful."

Raoul de Gibas was piqued, and the Beauregard wench had begun to

bore him. He was even beginning to be a little sentimental about the absent Yvonne. Meeting old Delaroche in Tours, he showed himself curious about the new occupant of "The Hermitage."

"Hullo—what's this? 'The Hermitage' taken, and by a mysterious lady."

Old Delaroche looked as solemn as an owl.

"A client of mine—yes, and a very charming lady. Beautiful weather—Monsieur Raoul."

"But who is the woman?"

"What woman?"

"This Hermitage lady. What possessed her to take such a mouldy place?"

"Her name is Madame Le Plessiel. She is quite young and desires solitude. Her reasons are her own, Monsieur. I know and approve of them—but I do not discuss my client's private affairs."

He screwed up his lips, and then renewed his remarks on the excellence of the weather. But Raoul de Gibas had smelt the perfume of a romance. The lure and mystery of the unknown called to him; the moth had sighted the burning candle.

He rode next day in the direction of "The Hermitage," saw that some of the shutters had been opened, but no sign of romantic life rewarded him. The rusty gates closed the same drive. The yew walk on the other side of the low stone wall looked thinner and yet gloomier than ever.

Raoul de Gibas rode back, and encouraged Pierre to gossip.

"Well—what about the new lady at 'The Hermitage'?"

Pierre cocked a cunning eye.

"A queer lady, Monsieur. She never comes out of the house except at dusk. And they say she walks up and down the yew alley, and wears a black mask. Mon Dieu—but she must have some great sorrow."

Raoul showed a critical spirit.

"Who told you this nonsense?"

"People—just people."

"Bosh!" said his master, resolv-

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ing to ride over at dusk and see the thing for himself.

Fate and his own restlessness decided the issue, and in the soft green gloom of a June evening he saw a woman in black walking to and fro under the branches of the yews. She was young and slim, and the black velvet vizard she wore made her skin look white as milk.

Raoul de Gibas had brought his horse along the track that skirted the stone wall. His head and shoulders showed above the wall, and being a gentleman and a courtier he raised his hat to the woman in black.

She returned him a slight bow, and a streak of sunlight flashing on her hair made it look the colour of red gold. Raoul reined in his horse, but she paid no more attention to him; in fact, his presence seemed to disturb her, for she turned and walked towards the house.

De Gibas felt himself thrilled. So this was the mysterious Madame Le Plessiel, this slim, tall, golden-headed creature with a skin like milk. He had imagined a pair of sad grey eyes behind that black mask, and he rode back to Gibas with all his curiosity aflame. Who was she, and why had she come to that melancholy house, and why did she wear that mask? Some great sorrow must have overtaken her. And Raoul de Gibas felt that her sorrow was his affair, and that he had a right to be interested in so mysterious a neighbour.

He rode over again next day at the same hour, and beheld the same vision. Again he raised his hat to her, was given that slight bow in return. And again this Madame Le Plessiel seemed troubled by his presence, for she turned her back abruptly and retreated towards the house.

She was between laughter and tears, ecstasy and anguish. She had spread her magic, and her own husband was being lured into her enchantment. Fool, beloved fool!

Old Jeanette met her in the hall.

"It was Monsieur Raoul?"

"Yes. This is the second time. What humiliation for me, Jeanette."

"No—Madame, it will be his salvation."

Yvonne went into her room, took off her black mask, and lit a candle. She looked at herself in the long mirror on the wall, and saw a picture that was Yvonne and yet not Yvonne. She had changed the dressing of her hair, altered her height by a pair of very high-heeled shoes, and remodelled two of her dresses. Also she had discovered in herself a new craft, the subtle craft of the actress. She spoke to her own reflection in the glass in a voice that was the voice of a new Yvonne, languid, slow, and half a whisper.

"How is Blanche Le Plessiel tonight? Weary and a little sad? But yet—she has a lover."

Suddenly she fell on her knees, and covered her face with her hands. A great trembling seized her.

"My God—but the shame of it! And yet it is necessary. This Gaston shall not conquer."

Three days later the romance had risen like the full moon. Raoul had stopped his horse at the iron gates, spoken to his mystery woman, and had been answered.

"We are near neighbours—Madame. If I can be of any service to you in any way, the honour will be mine. I am Raoul de Gibas."

"I am a very lonely woman—Monsieur, and lonely women can be grateful."

Next day he was permitted to leave his horse at the gate, and walk with her under the yews. She had waited till the light was very dim, yet she was terrified lest some trick of hers should make him recognise her—some familiar gesture or thrilling of her voice. She had made a mental picture of what this Madame Le Plessiel should be like, and she played to her own fancy.

And Raoul was fooled by her acting. Never for a moment did he suspect that she was his wife. The dusk, her mask, the way she had

The Portrait

dressed her hair, her slow and rather haughty walk, her languid, half-lipping voice, all these deceived him.

He came each evening, and within a week he was making love to her, and pleading to be allowed to see her without the mask. She had hinted at a great sorrow, the treachery of one who had been very dear to her, and a vow she had taken not to show her face to a man for a year.

"I ask nothing more of life," she told him, "and I have put happiness out of my thoughts."

He wanted to console her, and with the egregious impulsive passion of the male took none of her sadness as a challenge to his own good faith. The whole setting of the romance bewitched him, the darkness, her mystery, her queer vow, his self-imposed belief in her beauty. He was fooled, piqued by the strangeness of it all.

"Why not trust me," he said; "something draws me here each evening. I cannot keep away."

She smiled.

"You ask me to trust a man! Perhaps it is impossible."

"Even if I love you."

"How can you love me? And what is love?"

He tried to take her hand, but she repulsed him, bating the man and loving him, ready to laugh and to weep. What a boy he was, tricked by a little moonlight and strangeness; for ever desiring something new. And she found in herself two women, the beloved and the desired, and the wife who seemed forgotten, scorned.

Her bitterness conquered for the moment.

"No—it is all foolishness. I do not think that I shall ever trust a man again."

"But—if—I love you. By God—I do love you."

"Oh—Monsieur, to how many women have you said that? To your wife—perhaps."

"My wife! How do you know?"

"I know it very well, Monsieur."

I have a feeling that she must be unhappy, even as I am unhappy."

She had struck home, and the vain passion in him was sobered. His face gloomed in the dusk.

"Unhappy? And you—Blanche?"

She said very softly:

"I love my husband—even though I may no longer be necessary to him. And perhaps Madame de Gibas is as I am."

He was greatly moved.

"My God—are you trying to teach me a lesson? Wait. I was in love with Yvonne—why, it was only yesterday—"

"A man grows used to loving, so used that he forgets a woman may never forget. I have never forgotten, Monsieur Raoul. That is why I tell you to go away. I happen to love my husband."

"But he has wronged you—!"

"And you? Are you blameless?"

He caught her hand and kissed it.

"You have dared to tell me the truth. I did not think there was a woman—such a woman. What am I? A fool—or worse—?"

She moved away—but her heart went out to him.

"It is, perhaps, that you have forgotten 'yesterday.' Go back to 'yesterday,' Monsieur Raoul."

He said, "I will."

Next morning he found a letter on the table, and recognised Yvonne's writing. And as he sat down and read it, the portrait of Gaston de Gibas leered down at him!

"Dear Husband," she wrote:

"I love you, but yet I think that I have fallen out of your life. You have grown used to me and my love for you, and I shall not return to the Château of Gibas. Think kindly of your Yvonne, and forgive her as she forgives you."

Raoul de Gibas stared at the letter and then laid it down on the table. He was shocked, a little bewildered, and unable to believe what he had read. Yvonne not coming back to

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him? Impossible! Why—she was another Blanche Le Plessiel.

And then the truth dawned on him, the great truth that he loved Yvonne, that she was part of him, the soul and essence of his life. A hundred tender memories thrilled his consciousness. He wanted her as he had never wanted her before—Yvonne, of the clear grey eyes, Yvonne who loved him.

He raised his head and saw the face of Gaston de Gibas smiling at him with cynical amusement. And suddenly he understood why Yvonne had hated that portrait.

"You think that I am like you—Gaston, eh?"

He stood up and glared at his ancestor.

"You sneer at me, do you, with those cruel old eyes of yours. Well, I'll settle you. Yvonne was right."

He picked up a knife, pushed a chair against the wall, stood on it, and slashed Gaston de Gibas' lean face out of the picture.

Then another impulse made him ring the bell and order his horse. He would ride over to "The Hermitage" and ask Madame Le Plessiel to tell him what he should do. And he wanted to thank her, the first woman who had told him the truth.

He went. And to his surprise he found her walking in the garden and wearing her black mask.

"Forgive me—but I want your help."

"How can I help you?"

A strange thrill went through him. Why, surely she reminded him most amazingly of Yvonne.

"I have a letter. She says that she is not coming back to me; that

she has learnt that I need her no longer."

"Well—?"

"My God—but I love her."

Madame Le Plessiel gave a strange little laugh.

"O—man—man—do you know what love is, what your own heart desires? Is it the real love you need, or the new mouth of any silly girl. And yet—somehow—I love you."

She snatched off her mask.

"Yvonne!"

She held out her hands to him.

"Forgive me. You will forgive me—as I have forgiven you. Am I still beautiful, yes—even mysterious—when you did not know me in the dark? I wanted you to learn the truth, Raoul—because I love you, because you are too good for women like Lucrèce Beuregard—"

"Yvonne—you knew?"

"Yes. And I have been fighting the portrait of Gaston—Gaston who wounded those who loved him."

"My God—what a fool I have been!"

She caught him, and let him bury his face in her bosom.

"O—my dear man—I love you, and I want the pride to last in my love."

He kissed her hands.

"I have cut that portrait to pieces," he said; "yes, I did it this morning after I had read your letter."

"Then let us go back to Gibas," she answered, "and when you are restless—I will come to 'The Hermitage' and put on the mask."

"And you shall call me a fool."

WARWICK DEEPING.



THE LITTLE HILL

We climbed the little hill last year,
And, out of breath, you tried to smile,
But, panting, stopped, and sick with fear,
I held you in my arms awhile.

I guessed the truth—that you must die—
It froze my heavy heart to stone:
Then, love, you went from me—and I—
I climb the little hill alone.

JESSIE ADELAIDE MIDDLETON.

JUNE 1920 (12)
Cassell's



THE YELLOW PIERROT

By WARWICK DEEPING



FOR seven days Andrea Romano had been watching the two women.

They were such contrasts, Day and Night—Ursula and Semiramis, yet they were always together. Andrea had seen them driving down the Via Lata, playing at the "tables," sitting in the gardens listening to the band, dancing together at the Casino ball. They seemed inseparable, yet they hardly ever spoke.

The Contessa was what the world called "a magnificent woman"—black, imperious, superb. She looked at men boldly with her big eyes, and showed a fierce animation when she talked. Her companion—Renata Carillo—looked like a little shaft of pale light; a slender ray that trembled under the edge of a thunder cloud.

Both women were widows; both were aristocrats and rich. The casual world was content to think that the common comradeship of sorrow had brought them together to live a life that was rather vain and empty.

Andrea thought differently. He was a little unusual both in heart and head; a man who had suffered; a man whose ideals sometimes blazed into fire, and a Florentine with a touch of Savonarola's soul.

These two women hated each other. Romano made the discovery in the strangest of ways. At Cavallo everybody gambled; some people made a five-franc jest of it; to others it was a lust. And one evening he watched these two women at the tables, sitting side by side, darkness and light. Something tragic and sordid happened; a few people smiled, others went on playing with imperturbable selfishness. Andrea saw the pale girl wince, push her chair, and begin to rise.

Instantly one of Julia Savelli's big, white hands gripped her arm above the elbow.

"Sit still!" That was what her lips seemed to say.

Renata Carillo made an attempt to

move, and Romano was conscious of the grip of that other woman's hand. Her fingers dug themselves into the softness of the girl's arm.

Neither of them spoke, but Andrea saw their eyes meet in a quick stare of hatred, defiance, menace. It was all over in five seconds. The pale woman's eyes seemed to falter, to fill with vague fear. She remained at the table with the air of one whose heart was sick, and whose neck stiffened itself against a sense of humiliation.

Andrea moved round the table and stood behind them. The Contessa had the neck and shoulders of an Amazon, and the pale girl looked frail and helpless beside her. They did not speak, yet Andrea had a feeling that Renata Carillo was quivering like a sensitive thing that has been struck by a whip. She was afraid. She had to breathe an air that she loathed; rub shoulders with people who revolted her. And why?

That was what Andrea asked himself. Something took fire in him. Such a man cannot keep his soul out of the eternal struggle between darkness and light.

He had a friend, a Frenchman, who knew the Contessa and Signora Carillo, and Andrea got himself introduced. It was at the Princess Ruspoli's reception, and all Cavallo was there—the Cavallo that mattered.

A superb orchestra was playing dance music in the alcove of the big room. A few people were dancing, and Andrea asked Renata to dance.

She looked up at him in a queer, unsmiling way, and then at Julia Savelli, who was talking to the Prince.

"I do not dance very well," she said.

"Nor do I," he answered simply; "but does it matter?"

She stood up, frowning slightly, as though she had sensed something unusual in this man and did not know whether she would find him impertinent.

"It may matter," she said; "if a man dances badly——"

He was quick.

"I shall not tread on your toes. If I do, snub me."

She gave him a faint smile. This man had not the bold eyes of the cynical worldling. They were stern eyes, yet gentle. Also he danced well, and with that quiet confidence that puts a woman at her ease. Their bodies were in instant sympathy, and as he guided her through the crowd he began to talk.

"Are you staying long here?"

"I don't know. It depends."

"On the Contessa?"

She gave him a quick, almost resentful glance. Was there anything behind that seemingly casual question? "Perhaps."

"Of course—you are inseparable," he said.

She remained silent, head slightly averted, and they finished the dance in silence. Romano led her to a chair and prepared to move away.

"May I ask you again?"

She met his glance, and a little shock of surprise went through her. She knew at once that the man in him was interested in the woman in her; it might be the beginning of something—anything. She flushed slightly, hesitated.

"I don't know——"

Andrea noticed that she glanced about the room.

"It would be a great pleasure to me," he said.

"Yes—presently."

He bowed and left her.

They danced again twice, drifting quickly towards the edge of an intimacy that called itself friendship and was something more. The pale girl with her grey eyes seemed to recover her buoyancy and some of the joy that is youth. Andrea felt the charm of her, a beautiful and gentle delicacy—a sensitive lightness that answered to the touch of a hand or the play of a thought. It was as though she danced out of some tragic shadow into the sunlight.

Of a sudden he had a feeling of being watched. He looked quickly towards one of the big palms with which the room was decorated, and saw Julia

Savelli standing there talking to a little man with greasy hair and the face of a white ape. She was watching Renata Carillo; watching them both.

In the turn of the dance Renata's eyes met the Contessa's, and Andrea felt her sway away from him, miss her step; the unconscious rhythm was broken.

"You are tired?"

"No."

But the life had gone out of her, and at the end of the dance Andrea saw her go to Julia Savelli. She seemed to walk unwillingly as though under compulsion, the slave of some gross tyranny. The big woman made a sign with her hand. Renata sat down. The fat man with the face of an ape sat down beside her.

Andrea went and stood in one of the window recesses and looked out on the gardens and the sea—that blue sea with never a cloud shadow to darken it; but Andrea's thoughts cast shadows. Renata was afraid of that other woman. Julia Savelli had some sinister influence over her—an influence that she seemed to delight in using, and yet they hated each other. Romano was puzzled.

He went back again to ask for another dance and had the strangest of refusals thrown in his face. It was the Contessa who gave the refusal.

"You make yourself conspicuous, Signore. There are plenty of pretty women in the room."

Andrea stared. Her manner was as arrogant as her voice. He glanced at Renata Carillo, but her head was bent and she made no sign. The white ape was studying Andrea with a shy, suppressed insolence.

"I beg your pardon, Contessa, but I am addressing the signora."

Julia Savelli looked him full in the face.

"If a man has not the sense to see when he is superfluous——"

Andrea turned and walked off.

But he had been challenged, and his hand went to his sword. There was some mystery here; some reason for this big woman's insolence, for Renata's fear of her, and for the presence of that Semitic ape. Looking back as he left the room Andrea had a glimpse

of Renata dancing with the fellow, and Romano's blood flamed hot. She looked miserable, listless, clasped helplessly against the fat of that little, sallow-faced Silenus. Andrea felt himself involved—becoming part of the problem.

From that day he set himself to force his way into Renata Carillo's life, and as his love for her increased, he grew more and more conscious of her resistance—the resistance of a woman who had some secret fear. Andrea pursued, and she fled, yet with eyes that looked back at her pursuer. She did not wish to fly from him, for Romano's love had touched her heart.

"Why do you run away?" he asked her.

"Do I run away?"

She was always on the defensive, trying to talk of impersonal things, or of her boy who was living with his grandmother in the great house at Rome. She loved the child, and yet she had separated herself from him, and her exile seemed inexplicable—part of the mystery of her association with Julia Savelli. Andrea realized that the Contessa had some strange hold over her—a sinister grip on her soul.

"Why do you live with this woman?"

Her face became a mask.

"Please do not ask such questions. I cannot answer them."

He looked at her with those intense yet gentle eyes of his.

"Some day, perhaps, you will answer that question. There is a thing that is stronger than your silence."

"If that is so—it is better that we should not meet again."

"Impossible," said Andrea; "the sun rises each day."

She went back to the villa in a panic mood—a mood that trembled with exultation. She was loved and by a man whom she could love; and yet it was a disaster, a thing of divine despair. A sudden anger woke in her—an anger that beat itself against the bars of her cage. She went straight to the salon, entering it by the French window that opened on the garden, and found Julia Savelli lying on the couch, reading.

"Will you listen to me a moment?"

"I am always ready to listen, *cara mia*."

"Oh, let the irony go. Is there no pity in you at all? There are times when I could kill you."

The big woman laughed.

"So you are in love. I thought so."

"It is true. I am not ashamed."

"With that Florentine fellow. But it is quite impossible, you know. You are to marry Taddeo Cossa."

"That beast!"

"A charming person; so mature, and so handsome. I think it is better that you should not see this Andrea again."

And then she sat up with all her ironical pleasantry swept suddenly out of sight by a storm of insolence and hatred. She was a devil, and she had the face of a devil.

"You will not see him again. You understand? We are going to Venice, and in a month you will marry this fat pig. Is he not loathsome enough for you? I could not have chosen anything more monstrous."

Renata closed her eyes.

"I pray to God that I may not kill you."

"Fool! You kill me! Why, I could throttle you with one hand, and I carry something else on me as well as those papers. And it will hurt you—this marriage; it will hurt you horribly, just as your other marriage hurt me."

"Was I to blame? If you had loved Guido—before he was my husband—you would not trade upon that infamy of his now that he is dead."

"I humiliate you—that is all. You shall drink the dregs of it; I take my revenge."

Renata Carillo surrendered as she had surrendered day after day during the last three years, letting her pride suffer martyrdom in order that the pride of a family and of a child might escape humiliation. She told herself that she would not see Andrea again; but chance and a man were too strong for her.

She had been shopping in the Via Lata—they were leaving for Venice next day—and she was walking back through the public gardens when she heard his voice behind her. He had been watching, and had followed her.

"How invisible you are these days."

She hurried on, but he overtook her and walked by her side. His face had

a fanatical tenderness, and his eyes dominated hers.

"When do you leave this place?"

"How do you know that we are leaving Cavallo?"

"Because it is part of the great thing that matters."

She gave a little, helpless shake of her shoulders.

"I do not wish you to play with fire—I am fire."

"I am not playing. If I have to put my hand into the fire I shall not flinch."

"We leave to-morrow," she said.

"And you go——?"

"I shall not tell you."

"Then I shall find out. It is easy."

"We go to Venice."

"Then I, too, go to Venice."

She stood still, looking at him.

"My friend, do you not know that I am trying to save you pain?"

"While you continue to suffer? Am I blind? You are going to Venice with Julia Savelli—because that devil has some power over you. You will tell me what it is."

"I cannot," she said. "Oh, I cannot. It is all so impossible. You could do nothing——"

"I shall follow you to Venice—I shall follow you everywhere until you tell me."

She was shaken, assailed by the voice of the lover in him, the tenderness that she had longed for and lacked through all these miserable years. There was a seat close by, set back in a recess of flowering shrubs, and she made a movement towards it, a movement of helplessness, surrender.

"What do you wish me to tell you?"

"Everything."

She was frightened.

"Here? It is impossible; there are too many people."

"Well—you will tell me in Venice. Where are you staying in Venice?"

"I have a little house in the Via Bonella. She will be in the Savellie Palace; you know it, perhaps, with its balcony looking out on the Grand Canal. You may come to the Via Bonella, but she must not know."

Andrea frowned.

"So she can hurt you—even when you are not in the same house with her—and from a distance."

"Her hands would reach out for me across the world, my friend. Be persuaded not to meddle in this affair. She can hurt you—as she hurts me."

"I accept the challenge," he said; "life may teach a man to be proud of his wounds."

Renata Carillo's house in the Via Bonella stood, with its soft yellow-coloured walls and green shutters, closely pressed between the heavy shoulders of a palace and a library. It seemed to glance out shyly and a little pathetically from between them, like a child looking out from a crowd. It was a soft, blue night when Andrea took a gondola from his hotel, and, leaving the gondola at the steps at the end of the Via Bonella, walked to Renata Carillo's house.

An old woman opened the door, made a sign to him to enter, and closed the door behind him.

"It is the Signore Romano?"

"Yes."

"The signora expects you."

In a little room lit by a Roman lamp, Andrea found Renata sitting on a couch by the window. She did not rise, and her figure had a rigidity that was almost ugly, the rigidity of a Madonna in an altar piece by some early master. Her eyes had a fixed, unseeing look. Andrea, who would have kissed her hands, felt himself in the presence of a woman whose heart and hands had been pierced, a woman who was cold because her emotions dared not let themselves relax. He bowed to her, touching the sacred edge of her self-control; a coarser, rougher gesture would have been an outrage.

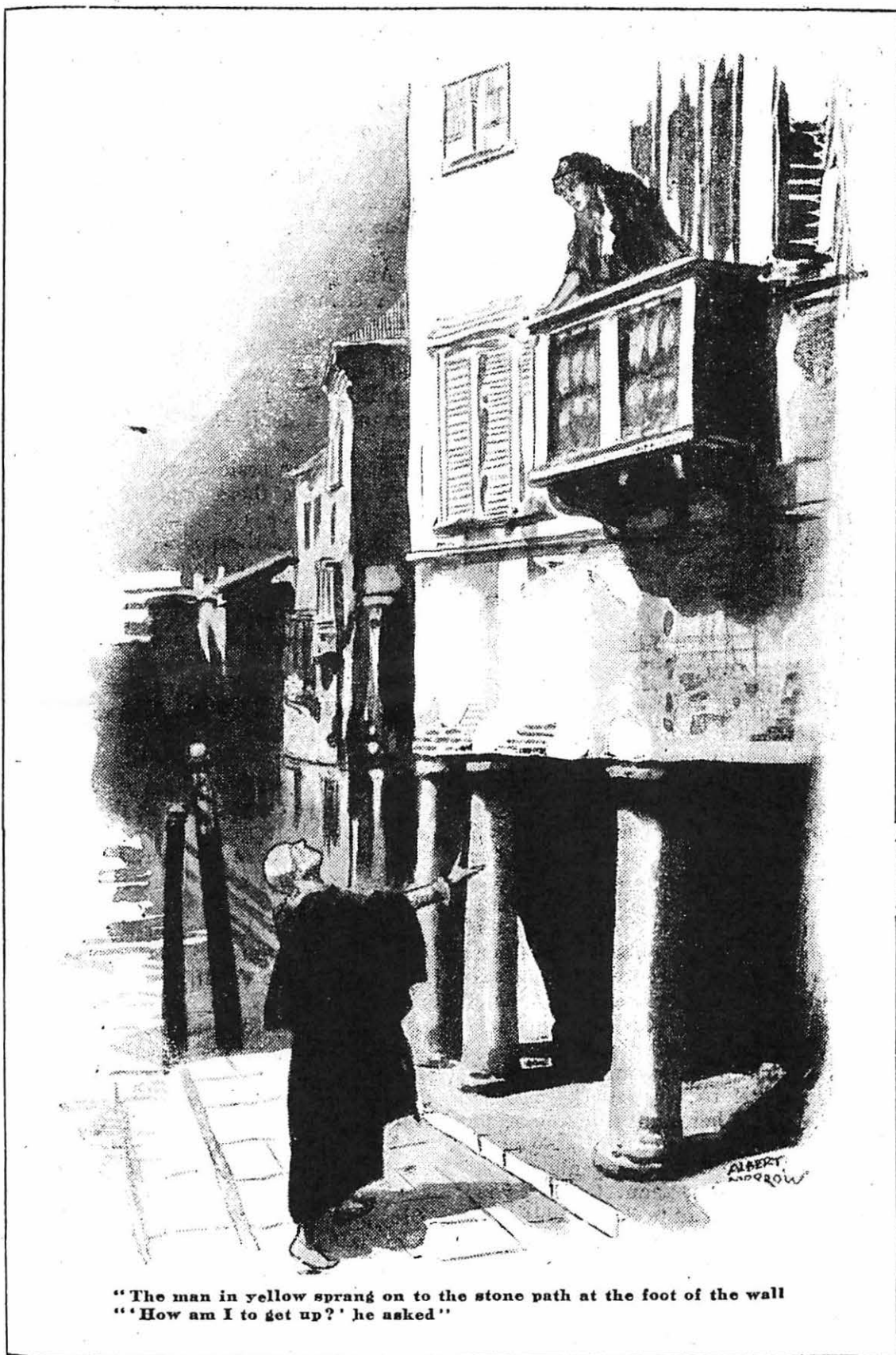
"Please sit down."

She spoke very calmly, but with an effort.

"Now—am I to tell you everything?"

"It will be sacred."

"It will not take long. Once upon a time—as the stories say—Julia Savelli and I were girls together. I think we hated each other even in those days, but I never knew what hatred could be till the man who married me was the man whom Julia Savelli had wanted for herself. She could not hurt me then, but fate gave her opportunity; she had waited.



"The man in yellow sprang on to the stone path at the foot of the wall
"How am I to get up?" he asked"

During the war she was at the head of a hospital; Guido—my husband—was brought to her hospital, mortally wounded. The pride of the Carillos has always been fanatical; it lived in Guido's mother, in me, even in our boy, and we were so proud of Guido. Yet he was nothing but an Austrian spy."

She seemed to grow more rigid, more calm.

"Think what it means to discover such a thing in one whom you have trusted. It appears that my husband had incriminating documents upon him; he knew that he was dying, and he wanted to cover up his shame. In his anguish he turned to Julia Savelli—a man always thinks that a woman is full of pity—he confessed to her, begged her to destroy the documents. She promised, and Guido gave them to her before he died. But she did not destroy those papers; she had found her weapon, her weapon against me."

She paused, not looking at Andrea, but past him into the shadowy corner of the room.

"She told me everything. She was like a woman drunk with exultation and delight. I was to come and live with her, obey her in everything, or she would tell the truth. Did I care for the pride of the Carillos? Would I like my boy to grow up and know that his father's name was a thing to be spat upon by every good Italian? How pleasant it would be for me, and for that proud old autocrat in Rome, his mother! What could I do? I surrendered and went to live with her."

Andrea spoke for the first time.

"Wait—let me take up the story. I can see it all, everything. You sacrificed yourself to her hatred. You let this devil put her hand into your soul. It was her delight to humiliate you, to hurt you with all the ingenious insolence of a bad woman, to tear your pride to pieces and to do it publicly?"

"Yes."

"And there is something more?"

"Yes, there is something more."

"Tell me."

"She says that I am to marry again, and to marry that man whom you saw me dancing with at Cavallo. She chose him because he was the most re-

pulsive animal that she could find. I am to marry him within the month."

Andrea stood up. His face was a white flame.

"That—shall never happen. I would kill the man in order to prevent it. But my will goes deeper than that. I shall tear the sting out of the woman's mouth."

She stretched out her hands protestingly.

"Andrea——"

He turned to her and caught her hands.

"Dear God—do I not love you, and shall I leave you in the hell of this humiliation? I think not. If this woman is a devil—I will cast out the devil."

He sat down beside her on the couch.

"Where are those papers? Do you know?"

"She carries them about with her."

"What arrogant self-confidence! But are you sure?"

"Yes. She laughs at me about it. 'If I am killed in an accident it will be awkward for you—you know!' They are in a silk case fastened by a stout ribbon, under her corsage. She has shown it to me."

"Are there no copies?"

"I do not know."

"Would you recognize the documents and know their number?"

"Yes. She was so brutally frank and exact. She made me read everything."

Andrea sat and stared at the Roman lamp, and the flame of it was reflected in his eyes, two small, steady tongues of light.

"So it comes to this," he said, "unless those documents are recovered—you will sacrifice yourself for the pride of the Carillos, and marry that man. And I love you."

"Don't—please; did I not warn you that you might suffer?"

It was Carnival night, and there were laughter and light in Venice. The sky was a deep blue dome dusted with stars. Venice too had her stars; they shone in the windows, on the balconies, on the gondolas that moved like shadows, stirring the dark waters into little ladders of light. A world of yellow fireflies, music, laughter, a

sound of merriment upon the water, mystery, love, happy fooling.

Two women and a man sat on the balcony of the Savelli Palace, looking down at the still water, the lights in the houses and upon the gondolas, this tapestry of black and gold under the dense blue sky. Creepers festooned the pillars of the balcony, and fairy-lights glimmered in the foliage, showing up the green of the leaves. Julia Savelli sat close to the balustrade, leaning one elbow on it, and watching Renata and the man.

She wore a dress of cream and yellow, a cape of crimson, and brilliants in her hair. Renata was in black. The white ape had appeared as "Faust" and looked monstrous and absurd.

They had been out on the water and had returned for supper, and now they were sitting on the balcony, watching. Renata was silent—tired, and talked of going home. The Contessa looked flushed—brilliant; she kept glancing down at the canal. A gondola had haunted theirs all the evening, a gondola handled by a tall man, an orange pierrot wearing a white skull cap and a mask with a prodigious nose. He had sung a song, a sentimental extemporized ditty:

"O—Queen of the Crimson Cape,
O—lady of Night and of Beauty."

Renata Carillo rose from her chair.

"My head aches; I am going home."

"Faust" jumped up, showing a pair of gross, fat legs.

"I will call our gondolier. I shall see you to the Via Bonella."

Renata thanked him in her tired voice. She felt that these lights were the mocking lights of a tragedy—that in the night something would happen.

"You do not mind our leaving you?"

The Contessa laughed.

"You two lovers! Taddeo is as gay and as wild as a boy."

Her irony was cruel in its grossness.

"Good night."

They left her alone on the balcony, waiting for that man in the dress of yellow flame. It was Carnival night, when men made love.

She was the red light for the orange moth. The woman in her knew that the man would come—that his boat was drifting somewhere among those other

shadows—that he was using his eyes in this game of hide and seek. And presently she saw a gondola gliding close under the wall, and the light from the balcony showed her that the man who stood at the oar was dressed in yellow.

He stopped the gondola and looked up.

"O—Queen of the Crimson Cape—I fly to the light."

She laughed down at him.

"You are very bold for a gondolier."

There was raillery in her voice, and the man played to it.

"I assure you my back aches; I am out of practice at this game of pushing an oar. Be merciful and give me permission to come up and sit in that charming balcony, in a comfortable chair, and smoke a cigarette."

"How very prosaic!" she said; "I do not like prosaic people. Besides—the gate at the bottom of the steps is locked, and I cannot bother to get the key."

The man in yellow sprang on to the stone path at the foot of the wall and fastened the gondola to the painted post.

"How am I to get up?" he asked.

"You will have to fly or climb."

"You shall see me climb," he said.

The balcony was about twelve feet above the landing stage, and the stem of an old vine, branching out into a network of stout cords, made the ascent easy to an active and determined man. The yellow figure swarmed up, and, reaching the top of the wall, sat sideways on it, leaning against one of the pillars. Julia Savelli was standing about two yards from him, poised like a Spanish dancer, superb, ironical, provoking, her hands behind her head. Andres saw that she was alone.

"Excellent," he said.

He had one hand behind him, and she saw the flash of his eyes behind his mask.

"Oh—I am excellent—am I! What a word to use! I do not like your nose, my friend; take it off."

He brought his right hand forward and she saw the knife.

"Stay—there," he said, "just as you are. We will drop the fooling and

come to realities. If you try to call the servants I shall kill you. I think I shall kill you whatever happens."

She stared, more astonished than afraid.

"Is this a Carnival touch?"

"No—it is reality, a real knife and real death."

"What do you want? My jewels?"

"Take out that packet from under your dress—those letters and documents—and give them to me."

She might have shown less fury if he had asked her for her jewels.

"Letters! What letters?"

"The letters a dead man gave you to destroy."

He swung one leg over the low wall.

"Be quick. I give you while I count ten."

"I have no letters on me."

"One. That is unlucky—for I shall kill you because you cannot give them to me. Two—three—"

He swung the other leg over the wall and stood up, holding the knife ready to strike her. Julia Savelli still kept her superb poise, head thrown back, throat showing—but the blaze had gone out of her eyes. She was shaken with fury and with fear.

"Who are you?"

"I am vengeance," he said, "death in the coat of a fool. You showed no mercy—neither shall I. I count eight—I count nine—"

She was a tall woman, but as he stood over her to strike she cowered. His upraised and menacing arm threw a shadow across her face, distorting it, darkening the eyes. He saw her sway as she stood; her knees seemed to bend under her, and she was lying at his feet. She had fainted.

Andrea bent over her, slipped his hand under her dress, felt the ribbon, broke it, and pulled at the silk packet. A strange exultation woke in him, a cry of gratitude and of relief. He had come here to kill, to sacrifice himself, to set Renata free with the blood of his own soul, and fate had been merciful. The knife had no blood on it; he had escaped this inspired murder.

He pocketed the packet, turned to the wall of the balcony and sitting poised there looked round at Julia Savelli. He saw her move. Her left arm raised itself; then that groping

hand of hers went suddenly to her bosom.

For a moment her returning consciousness seemed to feel its way uncertainly in the dark. Then the message passed from her fingers to her brain. Her eyes were open, her mind awake to the loss of the packet. She struggled up with a cry of anger, but the yellow pierrot had gone.

In the salon of her house in the Via Bonella Renata Carillo sat by the open window, listening. She saw the blue night, the stars, the massive blackness of the houses, the dark windows that seemed to wait for the dawn. The little street was very still, so still that her own thoughts seemed to make a noise.

She heard footsteps, and, leaning forward, looked down into the street. A man had stopped outside the house, and his figure was grey in the darkness.

"Who is it?"

"Andrea. Let me in."

His voice had vibrations of triumph. She ran out and down the stairs into the dark vestibule, trembling and so confused by her emotions that she could hardly open the heavy door.

"Oh, is it you? What has happened?"

"Everything."

"You have killed her?"

"Thank God—no. It was not necessary. Come—"

He took her arm, for she was trembling, and her feet faltered on the stairs.

"Courage," he said. "I have those papers. I want you to make sure that nothing is missing."

She clung to him a moment, her forehead resting against his shoulder.

"Andrea! Oh, I'm strong again now. Where are they—let me see."

He gave her the packet, and tearing it open she spread the papers on the table and examined them while he stood and watched her, smiling the smile of a lover. He noticed a candle on a side table, and he walked across the room and lit it.

"They are here—all of them."

He returned with the lighted candle in his hand.

"May I have the honour of burning them?" he said.



THAT GREEK ISLAND

By WARWICK DEEPING



13

I WAS down below—breakfasting—when Quartermaster Farren came to report.

"Mr. Douglas sent me to say, sir, that there's a lot of smoke rising from that there island on our port bow. Looks rather like a signal, sir. He has put her nose that way, sir."

"All right, Farren. Tell Mr. Douglas I'll be up in five minutes."

I was in command of the gunboat *Squid* in the early 'eighties, and we were cruising around the Ægean, touching here and there at an island with a casual and friendly impartiality. There was some definite reason for the *Squid* being in those classic waters: certain influential gentlemen at home desired particular information; the matter was in my hands, and I knew what these influential gentlemen wanted. So we were just meandering with apparent aimlessness among the Isles of Greece, and since the sea was blue, and the weather splendid, and we had our Turkish tobacco and a first-rate cook, neither Douglas nor I had anything to complain of.

I went up and joined him on the bridge. He was a snub-nosed, fair-haired youngster, who looked as though he had left school two days ago. He had his glass pointed at an island that stood piled up like a blue thunder-cloud away to the north-east. From the faint grey line of a headland that jutted out into the sea a column of smoke rose, spreading out above in the calm air till it looked in the distance like a little stone pine outlined against the blue.

"Anything to be seen?"

He grinned and handed me the glass.

"Something like a black ant on its hind legs doing a kind of dervish dance," he said laconically.

I took a look through the glass, and made out a tiny black figure jumping about excitedly and waving something that might have been an old shirt or a flag.

"We're being signalled," I said; "but I'm blessed if I know which island this

is. Where's Farren? The old rogue may know."

But Farren did not know, though he had served seven years in the Turkish navy.

"Seen it before; that's all I can say, sir. Lots of these there calf islands swimming around."

"We'll stand in, Mr. Douglas; and send a man into the bows to take soundings."

I kept the glass on that microscopic figure that was in such an active mood upon the headland. It continued to jerk its arms up and down, just like one of those cardboard toys that are worked by a string.

"They want us pretty badly. I wonder what's wrong."

I saw Farren grinning.

"Well, what's the joke, Farren?"

"I was only thinking, sir, of a case of an old rascal who wanted to sell us his own neighbour's daughter. Captain Cochrane was in command of that there Turkish boat. She was called the *Caddy-jar*, after the Prophet's wife. We had a boy aboard, and he wanted to buy the girl, but Captain Cochrane—he was a gentleman, and he had tongue in him!"

Farren was a bore at times, and a rather presumptuous one, and I shut him up, being intent on watching the island. It began to lose its purple vagueness, to swim out of the blue distance towards us, like some Homeric isle, mysterious and strange. It was rocky, and yet green. I could see a wooded valley running upwards from the sea. There were pines, and cypresses, and ilxes, but I could see no sign of a house.

We neared the place rapidly, and I had another look through the glass at that jumping-jack of a man on the headland. I could make him out quite clearly now: a shortish, round-shouldered man, in a white shirt and black trousers. The thing that he had been waving was his coat.

He was the most uneasy mortal I have

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ever seen; for he kept turning about, and even when he was facing towards us he seemed to glance over his shoulder every few seconds.

"That man's been badly scared," I thought. "I wonder if someone is after him with a knife."

We were within a quarter of a mile of the island, and I ordered a boat to be got ready.

"I shall leave you in charge, Douglas."

He nodded with that amused, boyish, cynical look of his. It had been a chronic habit of mine to go ashore and leave him in command; but then it had been my business to go ashore and to pick up, with an air of casual informality, any information that might be of use to the political master-minds at home.

The *Squid* was brought to, and the boat slung out. I told the crew to let her have it, and we went for the island like a regatta crew in training.

The beacon fire was still smoking on the headland, and I saw the fellow scrambling down the rocks to the sea. He waved his arm as though signalling us to pull round the headland. He kept looking back at the thickets that covered the upper part of the headland.

I was getting ready to hail him in Greek, for I had been sent on this mission because I could patter in Greek and Turkish, when the whole look of the man sprang at me as a thing that was absurdly British and familiar. He was just the typical, middle-aged English man-servant, caught in his shirt sleeves, clean shaven, pasty, with his thin hair a little out of order.

"Hallo!" I shouted. "What's the matter?"

He scrambled down to the water's edge.

"Thank God, sir—you're English, sir! And have you guns in the boat, sir?"

We were within ten fathoms, and I told the men to hold her up. I could see the fellow's scared face.

"What do you want guns for? What's the matter? Have you been hurting somebody's feelings?"

The man was blind to humour.

"For God's sake come ashore, sir, and I'll explain. There's a landing stage just round the rocks."

I told the men to pull on, and on turning the point I saw a little stone quay

lying in the shelter of the headland with steps down into deep, clear water, and a mule-path zig-zagging away up the hillside and into the woods. The man in the bows caught hold of an iron ring with a boathook, and I stepped ashore.

I found the man in the white shirt and black trousers waiting for me. He was sweating, and his skin was the colour of tallow.

"Would you mind stepping a little this way, sir?"

He had a smooth, confidential way of speaking.

"Well, what's the matter?"

He threw a scared glance along the shore of the island.

"Ever heard of the eccentric Lord Chelwynd, sir?"

"No."

"I'm his valet, and this island belongs to him. He bought it from the Turks."

"Well," I said.

"As you don't know, sir, I shall have to tell you, sir."

"I suppose you will."

"Lord Chelwynd has always been a most h'eccentric gentleman, sir. His craze was animals—wild animals. That's why he bought this island and brought his collection here. He kept 'em in huge, half-natural sort of dens, and used to feed 'em himself daily. We had to keep a regular stock-farm to feed the beasts. A few months ago my lord got more eccentric, sir. He began to dress up in skins and go out into the woods piping with a flute. He's spent hours sitting by the beasts' dens, playing on that flute of his. He would have it that he was some sort of old heathen god called Pan, and that the beasts understood what he said and were just like his children. I don't know what Miss Barbara made of it; she could do most things with her father, and I don't think she ever imagined he would do what he has done."

I cut the valet short.

"What's happened?"

"My lord let all the beasts out of their dens yesterday. The islanders—the Greek fellows—skedaddled, then stole the boats here, and made off."

"What does the zoo consist of?"

"Three black leopards, a tiger, two lions, three bears, half a dozen wolves, four wild boars, a lot of antelopes, and some apes."

That Greek Island

"Good God!" I said. "Do you mean to say that all these beasts are making a sort of garden of Eden of the island?"

"It's a fact, sir."

"And what has become of Lord Chelwynd?"

"Heaven knows, sir. He went out dressed as Pan."

"And Miss Chelwynd?"

"Up at the house, sir. All the men have cut and run, and the women have shut themselves up in the cellars. I ran down here and got some brushwood together to make a smoke. Lord, sir! I've been green with fright. An old boar charged me just as I was getting to the cliff. I had to shin up a tree, and then the beast went off. I'd give something for a stiff whisky."

"And you've left Miss Chelwynd alone?"

"Well, sir, what was I to do, sir? I saw your smoke out at sea. And I had to come all down through the woods, sir, and without a gun, sir."

"I think you've done very well," I said, "and it seems to me that we shall have our hands full."

I took Bains, that was his name, back with me to the gunboat for fear some casual leopard might stroll down while we were away and make things unpleasant for him. Poor Douglas was a very sick boy when he found out what had happened, and that he was to be left in command while I took two armed boats' crews ashore for as fine a big-game hunt as a man could wish for.

"If you don't wipe out the whole lot to-day," he said, "you might let me have a go to-morrow."

I promised that he should, never guessing that I was on the edge of an adventure that would make me forget such a sporting child as Douglas existed.

Well, we went ashore—two boats' crews, fully armed, with twenty rounds of ball cartridge to each man and rations for the day. I put Farren in command of one crew, and kept Bains with me in my boat. We had rigged him out with a rifle, but I think he was still too scared to have hit an elephant at twenty yards.

"We'd better go straight to the house, sir."

"Of course."

The men formed up on the little stone quay, and I explained the adventure to

them. They tumbled to it like school-boys, and my remarks about Lord Chelwynd roused one big, incipient grin.

They didn't take the thing seriously enough, and I thought it necessary to chasten them:

"Look here, my lads," I said, "this won't be a sort of gymkana. As likely as not one or two of you will be badly mauled before the business is over. It's not one tiger we are after, but a whole menagerie. Keep well together, don't straggle, and if anyone feels sleepy he had better stay in the boats."

As though to emphasise my warning a sound came echoing down through one of the wooded valleys. It was the roar of a lion, and I doubt whether any of us Jack Tars had ever heard that sound before.

"You hear that. That gentleman isn't in the Zoo, behind iron bars, he's loose. So keep your eyes open."

I made Bains walk with me in the van, and we started to climb the mule path that led up to the woods. The trees were pines, and one could not see far, while here and there a mass of undergrowth blocked the view completely. I think it was about as solemn a place as ever I have been in. The great trees crowded round us with their black trunks, and it was dim, queer, and utterly still. Not a breath of wind was moving, and the blue of the sky was blotted out by the matted branches overhead.

Suddenly, right across the path some fifty yards ahead of us, a big black bear went lumbering. The beast was in view for about five seconds. It came and went just like one of those mock animals at a shooting gallery that pass across a stage.

But several of the men had seen it.

"Crikey, the Wild West ain't in it!"

A laugh went round, but the faces under the straw hats were tenser, the eyes more alert.

The path left the woods, and there opened before us a little plateau opening to the sea. It was as beautiful a spot as one could have imagined, with wooded cliffs making a half-circle about it, the blue sky above, the blue sea below. A long, two-storied white house stood at the top of a series of terraces, with groves of cypresses throwing stately shadows.

I could see that Chelwynd was a lover of beauty, and that he must have spent an immense amount of money on the

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place. The garden was a world of rambling magnificence, classic in its spirit, with white statues glimmering amid the green, and fish pools shining in unexpected places. The steps and balustrades of the terraces were of white marble, and the house itself had a great marble loggia surrounding it, and the vines that smothered it gave a pleasant shade.

The place looked peaceful and deserted in the sunlight.

"You had better find Miss Chelwynd," I said to Bains.

We were climbing the terrace steps when a very English head was thrust out of an upper window, and a very English voice hailed us.

"Have you seen the young lady, have you seen the young lady?"

"Who's that?" I asked.

"One of the maids, sir."

"What do you mean, Mary? Where's Miss Chelwynd?"

"She gone out—gone out to look for her father. She—would—go. And she's took a gun with her. She'll be dead and eaten before the day is out."

The woman was hysterical. She closed the window, and in another minute she was out on the terrace, bent on showing her delight at seeing English faces—sailors' faces, by fainting in the arms of the nearest man. I happened to be the person, and I passed her on to Farren.

"Go in and look round," I said to Bains. "Miss Chelwynd can't be so mad as to have gone out alone."

He went, and was back in three minutes.

"She's gone, sir. The other three women have shut themselves in the cellar and won't come out."

"Good God!" I said; "the girl must have pluck. How old is she?"

"Eighteen, sir."

"Does anyone know which way she went?"

Mary had recovered, and Bains questioned her. All that the girl could tell us was that Barbara Chelwynd had gone down the great cypress avenue that led to the little valley where the beasts' dens had been built.

I left four men to guard the house, and sent Farren with eight more to work through the woods towards the east.

"Kill anything on four legs," I said.

"We shall have to make a clean sweep of the menagerie."

I took Bains and a dozen men with me, and we started off down the cypress avenue and made for the rock valley where Chelwynd had kept his beasts. They had been marvellously built, these dens, with great fosses and sheer walls excavated in the rock. A strange silence hung over the place. The dens were deserted; not an animal remained.

Bains was perspiring, and I saw my men looking at each other and handling their guns.

Then the sound of a couple of rifle shots came over the hill.

"That's Farren. He's in action."

The sound seemed to go echoing round the island.

"Come on, men," I said, "it's time we did something."

Bains knew very little of the island. All his time seemed to have been spent in the house, and he was about as much use as a blind man would have been. We struck westward on chance, meaning to work round till we got into touch with Farren and his party. After climbing up out of the Valley of Beasts we found ourselves in more pine woods, and I made my men deploy, so as to cover as much ground as possible.

We were going down hill, and the trees were thinning before us when we heard the roaring of some great beast in the valley below. I ran on, expecting any moment to see Chelwynd or his plucky daughter lying mauled and dead—the victims of a mad obsession. But I caught sight of something very different, a sight such as a seasoned hunter might see but once in a lifetime.

Down there in a green space, a lion stood still as a statue, tail stiff, mane bristling. Towards him, slowly, fatefully, came the tiger, crawling almost on its belly, tail lashing the ground, its stripes shining in the sunlight.

There was a leap, a roar, a mad whirling of two huge bodies, and the beasts were at grips, clawing and biting at each other. My men stood round me, silent, motionless, watching the struggle. The tiger seemed to be having the best of it, when out of the woods came the lion's mate. She uttered no cry, but came bounding down. I saw a great paw go up, and I believe she broke the tiger's

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back, for he rolled over, quivered, and lay still.

But he had given her mate his death wound. He shook himself, faltered, gave a roar, and then lay down with his muzzle resting on his paws.

The lioness went up and licked him.

I heard one of the men utter my own thoughts.

"Seems a dirty low trick to shoot the ol' woman, mates."

"So it is, Sparks," I said, "but we've

"That's not Farren," I said; "it's the girl. Come on, men; come on."

We went at a double up the valley, Bains blowing hard beside me, for he was fat and out of condition. The sound of a second shot reached us; it had a sharper crack than the report of a Martini. Then more pine woods closed in on us, and I made the men spread out, for they had bunched together after the shooting of the lions.

Someone shouted away on the left.

"Look out!"

But we had sighted a dead bear, not a live one. The great brown beast was lying as though he were asleep, his tongue hanging out, a bullet mark behind his shoulder.

Barbara Chelwynd knew how to handle a rifle.

Suddenly two shots rang out in quick succession, to be followed by the wild snarling of an animal in pain. The sounds



"She had fired her last cartridge and was staring death and this black beast between the eyes"

got to do it. She'd old woman us without much mercy."

We fired a volley out of the wood. The lioness sprang in the air, turned over like a cat, and fell beside her mate. The lion lifted his head, looked towards us, and uttered a weak roar.

"Settle the poor beggar," I said.

The two tawny bodies lay side by side.

The men were reloading when I heard a rifle shot come echoing down the valley.

seemed to come from right above us, where the western slope of the valley went up almost like a wall.

I fired a shot as a signal and ran on.

The pines thinned abruptly, and I found myself in a green and open space under the sheer grey bastion of a cliff.

"Good God, sir, look there!"

Not more than fifty yards away, and slightly below us was a kind of hollow in the face of the cliff. It was too shallow to be called a cave, and jutting out

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from it a great flat rock made a platform some twenty feet across. Close to the cliff lay something that looked like the body of some primitive man, half naked, half clad in skins, and kneeling just in front of the fallen man was a girl in a white dress, hatless, her black hair hanging about her face.

Ten feet from her crouched a black leopard, like a cat about to spring, its tail sweeping the ground. A second leopard lay dead just below the rock platform, and the third beast, with its back broken, was trying to drag itself along with its fore paws.

The girl kept absolutely still, her eyes on the leopard. Her face was like the face of a statue, white and set. She had a rifle in her hands, but it was not pointed at the leopard, and I guessed that she had fired her last cartridge and was staring death and this black beast between the eyes.

I think she saw us, but she did not move. Her eyes seemed to be holding the crouching leopard in check.

Then I realised the horror of the thing. Girl and leopard were so placed that it was dangerous for us to shoot. "I decided that the risk was too deadly.

Moreover, the cliff here was in the shape of a rough half-circle, with the recess and the rock platform in the centre of the natural apse, so that one could not work round and get a flanking shot at the leopard.

I turned to the men.

"Don't fire—don't move."

I had grasped the fact that there was only one thing to be done if the girl over yonder was to be saved.

"Give me your bayonet, Garret."

The seaman handed it over. The rest stared at me.

"Look here, lads," I said, "someone has got to cause a diversion over there. When I have got half-way, follow me up and do what you can."

I left my rifle behind and went running over the stretch of grass, with the bayonet ready for action. I fancied that the girl's eyes glanced at me momentarily, and I remember thinking all in a flash how mighty pretty she was. Then the black beast heard me running, and jumped round on all fours like a cat.

I hadn't time to wonder what sort of thing the blow of a leopard's paw was

like. The black shape came at me as a cat darts at a mouse. I struck out, was knocked over, felt a great hairy body rolling over me. It was a rough and tumble. I stabbed at the beast blindly, and then found myself pinned by the left shoulder.

Then I had a confused vision of men running and shouting as they ran. It was the big A.B., Banyard, who got to me first and stuck his bayonet behind the leopard's shoulder, only to have his chest clawed to the bone for his pains. For the beast left me and turned on Banyard, and the seaman struck her again as she sprang. Bayonets and clubbed rifles made a mêlée of it, and I saw the leopard roll over and lie still.

I suppose the pain of that mauled shoulder made me faint, for the next thing I remember was finding myself looking straight up into the eyes of Barbara Chelwynd. She was kneeling beside me, while my men stood round.

"Thank you," she said quite simply.

Bains was fumbling at my shoulder, and he hurt me like blazes.

"It's all right," I said, smiling a very cracked sort of smile; "but what about your father?"

"He was stunned, nothing more."

"That's splendid," I said, wishing that I could let out a curse, for Bains seemed most confoundedly clumsy.

"Easy there," I said.

The girl saw and understood.

She got Bains out of the way, took his place, and made a couple of my men support me while she bandaged my shoulder. I found that the bandage consisted of strips torn from her white dress.

"Am I hurting much?"

"Not a bit. You are as clever at a bandage as you are with a rifle. I suppose you had fired your last cartridge?"

"I had only five with me—all that were left in the house."

"That's what I call pluck."

"We can flatter each other," she said, smiling.

In an hour we were back at the house, for Farren had come up and been sent with Bains for blankets and poles to make a couple of stretchers. But Farren had had a flask on him, and I had got on my feet and taken command again, for there was a look in Barbara Chelwynd's eyes that I had understood.

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God Pan had been wrapped up in blankets and carried on a stretcher. One of the leopards had struck him down, and he was still dazed and stupid.

I found myself on the terrace talking to Barbara Chelwynd.

"I don't even know your name yet."

"Trench—Basil Trench, of the gunboat *Squid*."

"You will be our guest here. Have you a doctor on board?"

We had no doctor, but I said that I could send the *Squid* for one, though I hoped her father would not need a medico.

"You need one yourself," she said.

Her words were prophetic.

That shoulder of mine proved a bad business. The beast's teeth had infected the wound, and for three weeks I lay in Chelwynd's house on that Greek island, delirious with fever and as near heaven or hell as any man could wish. Douglas had taken the *Squid* for a doctor, purloined an Italian from somewhere and brought him over.

Well, I recovered, and Barbara Chelwynd came and read to me, brought me fruit, or played to me on her piano.

But it was young Douglas who told me all I owed her. They had made me a bed in the cool shade of the veranda, and young Douglas sat there smoking and talking to me.

"You always had all the luck, Trench."

"You call it luck?"

"Well, I'd have stood clawing by any blooming leopard to be nursed by Barbara Chelwynd. And she saved your life, old man."

"How?"

He looked at me pityingly.

"Suppose you were silly half the time and couldn't enjoy it. She nursed you and pulled you through. Even that sweet Italian says as much. But the funniest thing of all is what has happened to old Chelwynd."

"What's that?" I asked.

"The crack on the skull the leopard gave him seems to have turned his brain right side up. He's as sane and as ordinary as my old gov'nor."

I remember—it was that very evening—I thanked Barbara Chelwynd. She was sitting beside me in a basket chair, a book in her lap, but the book had been neglected.

"I didn't know you had saved my life," I said rather gruffly.

"I didn't," she answered.

"Well, they tell me you did."

"Perhaps they think so. There is no doubt that you saved mine."

I don't quite know how. I got hold of her hand, but she let me hold it, while the twilight deepened and the cypresses grew black as ink.

"I should like to keep the skin of that leopard," I said; "but somehow I feel I'm a humbug."

"Why?"

"Because I couldn't help doing the thing I did, and—"

"Well?"

"I can't help loving you, Barbara."

"You may if you like," she answered.

Next day I saw Chelwynd. A tall, refined-looking man in white ducks came and sat down beside me, shook my hand, and began talking as though he had just stepped out of an Indian regimental mess. He was just the debonair, kindly, cultured aristocrat. One would never have suspected him of having been obsessed by that mad idea that he was the god Pan.

"We owe you a very great deal, Trench."

He was quite frank.

"I had a sunstroke years ago. I don't know whether it was that that made me make such a fool of myself."

I felt that I had to tell him the truth.

"I'm afraid, sir, that I too have made a fool of myself. I am a commander in the Navy, with a private income of four hundred a year, and I have fallen in love with your daughter."

He laughed.

"Is that a compliment to my daughter, Trench?"

"I don't know, sir. But I couldn't help it, sir."

"Nor could she, it seems," he said. "That leopard turned out a particularly officious animal. You shall have its skin, Trench."

"Thank you, sir; but—"

"And the rest. I don't know what right I have to say 'no.' Besides, I don't think I want to."

The skin of that black leopard has hung in the stateroom of each of my ships; it brought me luck, not to mention Barbara.

Oct 14
1921

The Romantic Young Woman

Telling how M. Cesar Defaux had the Honour to pull His Excellency's Nose!

By Warwick Deeping



HAT these ridiculous but romantic adventures should have happened to a jeweller's salesman goes to prove the philosopher's assertion that all history is a record of man's revolt against dullness.

Monsieur Gaspard Touzel was the proprietor of the most aristocratic jewellery shop in Petersburg. He had inherited the business from an uncle who had settled in Russia far back in the sixties. Cesar

Defaux was Monsieur Touzel's chief salesman, a shy, steady but rather *farouche* young man, a son of that Defaux who had been at school with Monsieur Touzel. Gaspard Touzel was a fat, wealthy, good-natured little gentleman, with a fancied resemblance to the great Napoleon, and there had been occasions in Monsieur Gaspard's life when he had behaved like the soldier-emperor. He became the autocrat, a tyrant with impervious gestures.

The greatest moment of Monsieur Touzel's life was inspired by Suzanne, his daughter. *Bijouterie*, yes! She was more brilliant than any stone in the Touzel shop, so brilliant that certain undesirable celebrities coveted her. Suzanne was not a thing that could be locked up in a safe. In fact she was ready to resent the carefulnesses of a protective affection; she was brilliant, therefore why should she not dazzle? She was young, and she was ambitious. Are not romantic coincidences the very blood of life? Suzanne was romantic. If it so happened that Grand Dukes and Princes, and Barons sometimes came into her father's shop, and discovering her there, promptly forgot all the precious stones, well, was it not very interesting?

But Suzanne was quite unusually pro-

vocative. That three or four eminent worldlings should have run half way round Europe in pursuit of her, proves that her beauty was something unique. There are certain women in history who have had this extraordinary power over men. Suzanne might have been one of them, had she not had Monsieur Gaspard for a father.

"Cesar, come here!"

Defaux found himself alone with Monsieur Gaspard in his private room behind the shop. He was expecting nothing more dramatic than a scolding.

"Cesar, you will marry Suzanne tomorrow at twelve o'clock. You understand?"

Cesar was very far from understanding. It was perfectly true that he was vastly in love with Suzanne, but being an inarticulate and difficult young man, he had never travelled beyond his first complete snubbing.

"Monsieur, you are serious?"

To question the seriousness of a Napoleon's father is to annoy him.

"Thunder! Am I serious?—You may be a steady fellow, Cesar, but a steady fellow is often a fool. If I choose to marry my daughter to you, am I to be laughed at?"

"Not at all, sir, not at all. But you astonish me—"

"Oh, that's not difficult," said Monsieur Touzel with an imperial shrug; "what I say is, you shall marry Suzanne, and you shall take the Paris express tomorrow. Have you any objection to make?"

Cesar's knees trembled.

"None, sir, none at all. I have long been—"

"Yes, yes, very good then."

"But, monsieur, I may have no objection, but your daughter—"

"Well?"

"She does not like me, you know. Is not that rather awkward?"

Monsieur Touzel seemed undecided as to whether he should laugh or frown.

"Not in the least. Listen to me, my boy. Suzanne has looks"—and he gave a little modest smile—"and Suzanne is romantic. Let me tell you that there is nothing more devastating and dangerous than romance. I am a bourgeois; I exult in being a bourgeois; it is so comfortable, my dear fellow. But these Russians, these aristocratic *canaille*, are becoming a nuisance. Only yesterday—well, never mind. Love, Cesar, is a habit that grows after marriage, that comfortable love that has money in the funds. You will marry Suzanne; you will take her to Paris, Vienna, Rome, anywhere you please. The expense shall be mine. And when you return, I shall take you into partnership."

Cesar Defaux was perspiring. What was this but romance, and Monsieur Touzel detested romance!

"You are very good, sir. But when we return to Petersburg, supposing these aristocrats—"

"*Tiens*," said his future father-in-law, "that will be your affair. A man can always keep his own wife."

"And if Mademoiselle Suzanne objects, sir?"

"My dear boy, she will be ready to scratch your eyes out. One cannot have everything all at once in this world."

Touzel pulled out his pocket-book and handed Cesar a packet of notes.

"Go and buy some new clothes, and a new trunk. I will break the news to Suzanne."

And Cesar accepted his fate. He was infatuated, but at the same time he was not without a certain stubbornness, a passionate patience that moves mountains and persuades women.

Monsieur Touzel broke the news very Napoleonically to his daughter. He was emphatic, the man of destiny, but there was lightning and thunder, tears and protestations.

"But I loathe him!"

"Please state your objections."

"He is ugly."

"Plain, my child, plain."

"He has no manners. He is a fool."

"His manners suit my business very

well. He has a hawk's eye for swindlers and paste."

"But I hate him!"

"Tut-tut; that is no objection at all. Mere prejudice. No more of these Grand Dukes and Barons, my dear, and all their gorgeous rubbish. Monsignore Thomas will marry you to Cesar at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and you will leave the same evening by the Paris express."

It all happened as Monsieur Touzel said that it should happen, and he himself saw the young people off from the station, waving his top-hat at them as the express steamed out. Suzanne looked sullen; Cesar, a little bewildered and worried. He had won his wife, but when your wife of an hour calls you "beast" under her breath, what are you to do!

They had a compartment to themselves. They sat in opposite corners, Suzanne holding a magazine in front of her face, Cesar looking thoughtfully at his new patent-leather boots. He had tried various methods of approach, of appeal, of conciliation. Suzanne would have nothing to say to him. He was in most complete disgrace.

"Supposing we make the best of it?" he said at last.

She dropped the magazine like a flash.

"Best of it!"

Was not that the philosophy of a shopman, of a fellow with no romance, no glitter?

"There is nothing else to be done," said the husband.

"A nice heart you have," she retorted; "you help to ruin my happiness, and then tell me to make the best of it."

She relapsed into tears, angry tears, and Cesar tried to comfort her.

"Oh, get out," and she slapped his face with the magazine, "I hate you."

Cesar looked at her helplessly, and then, accepting her advice, went for a walk in the corridor. He was so worried and perplexed that his walk took him through five coaches to the very tail of the train.

Meanwhile, something had happened.

A young Russian with the smooth look of a gentleman's servant had stopped outside Madame Defaux's compartment. He glanced quickly up and down the corridor, opened the door, bowed, and handed her a letter.

"With the Grand Duke's compliments, madame."

THE ROMANTIC YOUNG WOMAN

"The Grand Duke!"

"He is on the train, madame, travelling to Paris, but he does not travel as the Grand Duke."

Suzanne leant back in her corner, and slipped the letter under her dress.

"How very charming of him! But—please——"

The valet bowed and closed the door. He was a young man of wonderful discretion.

So Cesar Defaux brought this adventurously feminine thing to Paris and installed her in a little suite of apartments in the Rue Grouchy. The Rue Grouchy was in the Latin Quarter, and five years ago Cesar had lived the life of a student, happy, irresponsible days before Monsieur Touzel and Petersburg had risen above the horizon. He spent his fifth evening in Paris wandering about the familiar streets, drinking a bock at the Taverne Lorraine, and turning into Bulliers to watch the dancing. He was melancholy, distrait. Suzanne had assumed an air of pitiless hauteur. She was polite, fatally polite, and she had nicknamed him "The jailer."

Cesar sat at a table and gloomed.

"The devil take all aristos," he thought; "there was not a more sensible girl in the world before all this happened."

That was the pity of it. Suzanne of a year ago had been a charming practical young person, frank, almost ingenuous, though wide awake as to what her mirror told her. It had all arrived with her sudden passion for romance, her belief in impossibly chivalrous princelings, and mysterious, melancholy Barons. The question was, how was she to be cured? Her father had prescribed marriage, but for the moment the results appeared to be disastrous.

Then a man, loitering among the tables, glanced at him in quick surprise. He came across, hand outstretched.

"What, Cesar!"

"Antoine!"

They embraced. They had lived the Latin Quarter life together five years ago; they had been inseparable. In half an hour they had told each other everything that was to be told; they had exchanged hearts and heads.

"My dear fellow," said Antoine; "I have been married for two years. We began badly; we quarrelled every other

day, but now there are not two happier people in Paris."

Cesar was all eagerness.

"How did you manage it?"

"I did not manage it at all," said Antoine Boulanger; "it just happened. It will happen to you."

"I wish I could see how," said the troubled lover; "she hates me."

"Why, then, don't you see that you must be of immense interest to her?"

"I can see nothing of the kind," said Defaux.

Antoine strolled back with him to the Rue Grouchy, but he refused to be taken in and introduced to Madame Defaux.

"Another time, my dear fellow. We must have a little dinner at Gambetta's. You and your wife must meet Cecile."

In refusing to climb those stairs Boulanger missed a most dramatic and slightly ridiculous adventure. Also, he did his friend a very signal service, for had Antoine been present, Cesar might never have assaulted a Grand Duke.

There was a gas jet burning on the landing, and as Cesar ascended the last flight he saw a tall man in an opera hat and cloak, standing outside his door. The man had just arrived there, and had raised a white-gloved hand to knock.

"Hallo——!"

The man turned. He had a handsome face, dark eyes, and a little black beard, a face whose brilliant pallor made his beard and eyes look more black. Cesar stood and stared at him. He could hardly believe that the thing was possible. It was the Grand Duke.

"I beg your pardon——"

The man gave him a little smile that just lifted the corners of his mouth.

"What do you want here?"

"Is it possible that I am addressing Monsieur Defaux?"

"You are."

"What a charming coincidence!"

And then something happened to Cesar. All the perplexities, rages, disappointments, baffled tendernesses of a week seemed to spill over in him and catch fire. He saw in front of him the evil genius of this disastrous adventure. He saw red.

"Here, you get out," he said.

Almost before he realized the enormity of the offence he had the great man by the collar. There was a scuffle, an exchange of

blows. The door opened, giving Suzanne a glimpse of Cesar tumbling the visitor down the stairs with a violence that was catastrophic.

When he came back to her she was still standing in the doorway. They looked at each other like mortal enemies.

"That's that," said Cesar.

"Brute, monster!"

"Well, he won't come here again."

"You savage!"

He pushed her into the room, closed the door, and putting his arms round her, kissed her. She struggled.

"Let me go."

But he did not let her go.

"Suzanne, I love you, and I hate you. I suppose you sent him a letter."

"Well, if you want to know, he followed me to Paris. Let me go, you savage."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. The fool can take a black eye back to Petersburg. Now, we shall have some peace—"

She was furious, so furious that she did not care what she said.

"You think so! What if I tell you that there are others."

"Others! What do you mean?"

She tossed her head.

"Yes, all the way from Petersburg. They have asked to be allowed to pay their respects to me."

"The devil they have! I will return their respects to them. Who are they?"

"Prince Vassili. You had better be careful, you savage, how you behave before Prince Vassili. He has fought twelve duels and killed three men."

"Oh, has he, the scoundrel!"

He held his wife at arm's length, his hands on her shoulders.

"Suzanne, we are going to Rome."

"Rome!"

"Yes, to-morrow morning. Go and pack."

"But I don't want to go to Rome."

"Very well. We will commit suicide. Let me get my revolver."

For a moment she looked as though she were going to scream, but she did not scream. She went to the bedroom and began to pack her trunk. The man of tragedy—her husband—who had as much intention of shooting her as he had of making a voyage to the moon, was busy at the table looking at their passport and examining the contents of his pocket-book. She glanced at him with a little flicker

of curiosity. Really, Cesar was a prodigious surprise. How brutally yet triumphantly he had flung the Grand Duke down the stairs! Her romantic admiration for that great man had suffered an eclipse. Great men should not be kicked down the stairs.

"Cesar," she said presently.

He looked up.

"Must we go to-morrow?"

"Why not?"

"I wanted to buy some shoes in the Rue de la Paix."

"You can buy shoes in Rome, *chérie*," he said truculently.

Next day they took the afternoon train for Modena, Genoa, and Rome.

At Rome, Cesar had a week of peace. They stayed for a few days at a little hotel off the Corso, and then Cesar managed to obtain the sub-let of a little furnished flat close to the Piazza di Spagna. Monsieur Touzel, whose business was cosmopolitan, had given his son-in-law letters of introduction to people in Paris, Rome, and Vienna, and Cesar made use of these letters. The Defauxs were received into a little circle of French families, and Suzanne—the bride—created a sensation. What a pleasant couple, the young wife such a beauty, the husband so devoted, yet so virile!

In fact life seemed to promise many things to Cesar during the next fourteen days. Suzanne had ceased to be so outrageously polite. There were times when he found her looking at him with an air of curiosity, almost of interest. They wandered round Rome together. They made expeditions to Tivoli and Frascati; they sat and listened to the band in the Pincio gardens. In his large moments Cesar hired a carriage, and they joined the great world.

"Anyhow," he would say to himself, "I have the handsomest wife in Rome," but he did not say it to Suzanne. For Cesar was growing wise. To be considered a master, a fire-eater—that was the way.

But he began to make love to Suzanne, yet not as Cesar of Monsieur Touzel's shop might have been expected to make love. He did it rather fiercely, rather grimly, in moments of piratical passion. There were times when he took no notice of Suzanne; he would sit beside her, thinking, absorbed in the larger interests of the male.

THE ROMANTIC YOUNG WOMAN



"Your Excellency," said Cesar, "I have the honour to take you by the nose!"

She was puzzled. This was not the Cesar of Petersburg. Her husband began to be a rather mysterious and interesting person. She was even a little afraid of him. This savage!

Sometimes he would exclaim:

"Look, there's a handsome woman for you!"

And Suzanne was annoyed. She began to be a little jealous of any other woman who attracted Cesar's roving, piratical eye.

Then a Rome daily paper recorded in its society news the arrival of Prince Vassili and Baron Borkum in Rome. Prince Vassili was staying at the Ambassadors' Hotel, the Baron at the Savoia. Cesar had kept vigilant watch upon the

society news; and Suzanne had done the same.

"We shall see," said Cesar to himself; "this fellow may have fought fifty duels, but if he dares to speak to my wife I will pull his nose."

Nor was it wholly a matter of coincidence that Cesar should take his wife for a drive in the gardens at the fashionable hour of the day and leave her alone in the carriage in one of the avenues while he went off to buy a paper. Here was Andromeda chained to the rock and shrewd Perseus watching from behind a tree! He saw another carriage draw up beside Suzanne's. A man got out of it, a dapper little man, bright and snappy, like an irritable black and tan terrier.

He lifted his hat and smiled upon Suzanne.

Cesar intervened. He was very polite, excessively formal.

"Have I the honour of addressing Prince Vassili?"

The little man sneered at him.

"Ah, the husband!—Delighted, my dear sir."

They bowed.

"Your Excellency," said Cesar, "I have the honour to take you by the nose."

He did it most successfully, and with a quite scandalous deliberation. There was a scene. Two friends of the Prince rushed up; everybody talked at once; Suzanne, almost hysterical, began to laugh; the gentlemen exchanged cards.

Cesar stepped into his carriage.

"Piazza di Spagna," he said to the coachman.

They drove off. Suzanne was scandalized, and as white as the new monument to Victor Emmanuel.

"You will be killed," she said. "What a monster you are, what a savage!"

Cesar laughed.

"Tell me," he said; "did I not pull it well, like a bell handle?"

"Monster!" she repeated; "the Prince has the most aristocratic nose in Europe."

"Well, it has been pulled," said her husband; "it will never survive that."

When they reached the flat, Suzanne wept. She locked herself into her room, and would not speak to Cesar, but whether her tears were for him or for the Prince he was quite unable to say. It was probable that she was scandalized by so unromantic a scuffle, and Cesar had meant her to be scandalized.

He left her alone, and went out to obtain the assistance of two friends. When he returned he found two gentlemen waiting for him. He referred them to his friends; they would settle all the formalities.

And then Cesar felt frightened. The affair was serious, so serious that he beheld Suzanne as an interesting widow. Pistols! He had never fired a pistol in his life, and this venomous little princeling was a crack shot.

He knocked at Suzanne's door.

"It is all settled," he said.

"Are you mad?" she retorted; "I shall go for the police."

Then Cesar surpassed himself.

"You will do nothing of the kind," he said; "I forbid you to leave your room. My honour is at stake."

"But, Cesar——"

Her voice was tearful, and he exulted.

"I shall sleep in the salon," he said, "and the key of the flat will be in my pocket."

The "monster's" night on the couch was not particularly successful. He was frightened, more frightened than he had ever been in his life before; he thought of nothing but pistols, wounds, death, that wretched little aristocrat making love to his widow. It was this last thought that gave Cesar that passionate obstinacy that often passes for courage. Towards dawn he slept, and Suzanne, stealing into the room in the early light, found him asleep.

She stood and looked at him.

"How brave he is, how calm!"

She bent over him with a suggestion of tenderness.

"It is because he loves me so much."

She pushed against a chair in returning to her room, and her husband woke up with a start. He felt in his pocket; the key of the flat door was there.

"Suzanne," he said severely, "what were you doing here?"

She prevaricated.

"I had left my hand-bag on the table, and my bottle of scent was in it."

"Scent," he said, "scent! What a heart the woman has! Well, in an hour or two it will all be over."

She made a movement towards him, but he waved her back.

"Please remember that I have to steady my nerves. A wrist of iron, eh! Women should keep out of the way."

Half an hour later his two seconds came for him and he left Suzanne in tears upon her bed.

"Oh, these men! What savages! Am I to have no peace?"

"Peace!" said her husband; "*Mon Dieu*, I thought you were romantic, and wanted adventures. Well, we are getting the adventures. How selfish of you not to enjoy them."

And he went out, banging the door.

That duel took place, somewhere outside the walls of the Eternal City, and Cesar, white as his shirt, fancied that he heard them hammering nails into his coffin. The Prince looked ugly; he was

THE ROMANTIC YOUNG WOMAN

viciously facetious, and cool as one of the statues in the Vatican galleries. Cesar's knees shook, his hand shook, he felt that he had had no breakfast, or too much coffee and hot rolls. What a devil of a time they were over the formalities of the affair!

Yet that duel had a most ironical and almost ludicrous result. The expert missed Cesar, as experts will, but Cesar's wabbling pistol lodged a bullet in the Prince's right knee.

He was driven off in triumph, so astonished that he said nothing, and his two seconds took his silence to be the restraint of the strong man.

They left him in the Piazza di Spagna, Cesar informing them that he wished to go home alone and break the news to "madame."

He climbed the stairs, opened the door, and found Suzanne sitting rigid in a chair. She stood up, she stared, she seemed to struggle with some emotion.

"What, it is not over?"

Cesar placed his hat on the table as though he had returned from an early walk.

"Yes, it is all over."

"But the Prince? He did not kill you?"

Cesar shrugged his shoulders.

"Kill me! Look at me; I'm alive. Have I lost a hair? Where is the coffee?"

Her hands dropped. What a man this was!

"But, the Prince?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, the Prince! I left him with a bullet in his knee, I did not want to hurt the little man more than I could help, you know. And after all, Suzanne, it was you who made me pull his nose."

"I?" she said, "I? Oh, how can you say such a thing!"

Cesar crossed the room, and picked up a paper that was lying on the desk. He pretended to read it.

"*Chérie*, I am dying for some coffee; these adventures are very exhausting. Wait a moment. I see here that Baron Borkum is in Rome. Confound it, how many more of them are there? Will you please tell me, Suzanne, how many more noses I have to pull?"

She looked at him appealingly.

"Cesar! It is not my fault. I am sure he is the last: and he is a silly, fat old man."

"Oh, is he! I think that after I have had some coffee, I will go round to the Baron's hotel and punch his head. One may as well be thorough."

And then she burst into tears, and running to her husband, was taken into Cesar's arms.

"No, no! Don't go, Cesar; I cannot bear it any longer. You will get yourself killed, and then what will happen to me? Cesar, I am so tired."

He held her very close then, and kissed her.

"Well, perhaps I will let the Baron off, even though I love you so fiercely. But if you are so tired, *ma chérie*, perhaps you would like to go home. Just you and I, in a quiet little place—"

She clung to him.

"Yes, take me home, Cesar. Oh! these adventures, how tiring they are!"

So Monsieur Defaux and his wife returned to Petersburg. The false romances were over; the real romance of life had begun.



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The Pride of the Mericourts

*A Romance of False Gods—and
True Ideals*

By Warwick Deeping

THEY stood on the quay at Dover, these exiles who were about to return to France.

It was April, but the sky showed grey, and a hungry wind came over the sea. Catherine, Comtesse de Mericourt, looked like a little, old bright-eyed bird with her imperious nose poking out of her wraps. Diane, her daughter, pale and slim, black-eyed and black-haired, tried not to shiver, for her heart felt more chilled than her body.

They were shabby, these two exiles whom France and Napoleon were re-calling, but their pride was less threadbare than their clothes. Sir Stephen Erskine stood with them on the quay, looked at Diane with the eyes of a lover, and trying to shelter the old lady from the wind. The packet boat sailed at noon.

"In four days," he said, "you will be in Paris."

The old lady's figure seemed to stiffen, and her brittle black eyes hardened. Memories, yes, memories of that dreadful yet beloved city, of a husband and a son slaughtered, of Gabrielle, her eldest child, going with white face and shorn head to the guillotine. She looked at Diane and Diane's throat, where a necklace of rubies showed between the folds of the collar. Erskine, too, looked at that necklace. He knew its history and its meaning, and how the hands of Gabrielle, who was dead, had placed it there on the night before she died.

"Yes, we shall be in Paris," said Catherine de Mericourt; "we shall cultivate our pride."

Her little eyes gave a flash. Diane smiled. She smiled because she knew that if she did not smile she might betray herself with tears. She knew what she knew, and what this man who loved her

did not know. Pride, yes, a pride that would shut its doors and starve.

"It seems so long ago," she said, "when I saw the house in the Rue St. Honoré. You have been very kind to us, monsieur."

The old lady gave an imperious nod of the head.

"Yes, it can never be repaid. Remember, we do not forget, and we cannot repay."

Erskine smiled.

"Dear lady, the honour has been mine. And yet, it is possible—"

He looked at Diane, but she turned away her head.

"It is possible," he repeated, "that when I come to Paris, I shall come as a debtor."

The comtesse gave him a flash of the eyes.

"Oh, no, monsieur, do not dream dreams. See, they are lowering the gangway. If you will permit us—"

He was puzzled, as a lover may be puzzled, but he did not understand. He was there in their service; his coach had brought them from London. He gave his arm to the old lady, and she accepted it as far as the gangway, but there she withdrew her hand.

"We will part here, please."

It was a command, and he humoured her. But he held Diane's hand for a moment.

"Next month I shall be in Paris," he said.

She was white, and her eyes looked frightened.

"No, you must not come."

"I shall come. Nothing will prevent me."

She gave him one tragic, parting look, and fled down to the boat.

Erskine waited there in the wind, watching the packet cast off, but he did not see the two women again, for they had gone below and did not reappear.

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Somehow he had expected Diane to come on deck and wave to him. He loved her, and he believed that she loved him in return. And his love was so sure and strong a thing that it laid a man's grip on the future, never suspecting that there might be no future or that these exiles might cherish a tragic and a fanatical pride.

In a few weeks he would follow Diane to Paris now that peace had been declared. Her bidding him not to come was a woman's playfulness, the love which cries "Farwell" and in it hides a tender challenge. He meant to marry Diane. He had asked for her in England, but her old mother—that antique—had put him off. "No, monsieur, no. My daughter shall marry in France." Very good, he would marry her in France.

Sir Stephen Erskine drove back to London in his coach, and during the next three weeks he wrote Diane a number of letters, but no single letter came to him in return.

"Strange!" he thought. "They must have reached her."

And then it occurred to him that Diane de Mericourt might be ill, and the lover in him could be held back no longer. His coach carried him to Dover. A private courier had preceded him. Sir Stephen Erskine arrived in Paris on the seventh day of May.

Such was his impatience that he walked out from his hotel into the glow of a spring evening and made his way to the Rue St. Honoré. A strange excitement stirred in him. When he came to the house of the Mericourts, with its great gates opening upon the street, he hesitated, and then walked on. There is pleasure in temporizing, in playing with expectation, but in a little while the Englishman turned back and pulled the rusty chain of the porter's bell.

Nothing happened.

He rang again, and more loudly. Through the bars of the gate he had a view of a dark courtyard with grass growing between the stones. He noticed that the windows which were visible to him were shuttered, and that the house had a desolate and empty look. He was conscious of feeling chilled.

"Surely they are here," he thought.

He rang once more, and the bell was still sounding when he saw an old man

in livery come out of the house and cross the courtyard towards the gates. He was very old, so old that he looked as though he might crumble to pieces. His livery was shabby, so shabby that Erskine was conscious of feeling shocked.

"Is the Comtesse de Mericourt at home?"

The old man stared at him through the bars of the gate and made no attempt to open them. He shook his head, and Erskine thought him deaf.

He repeated his question in a louder voice, and added:

"I wish to see Madame la Comtesse. I am Sir Stephen Erskine, an English friend. They expect me."

The old man blinked at him and shook his head.

The Comtesse de Mericourt is not at home."

Nor Mademoiselle Diane."

No, monsieur."

Then they are not in Paris?"

No, monsieur."

In the country—perhaps?"

Yes, in the country."

When do they return?"

I do not know, monsieur."

Erskine could make no more of him, and he turned away from the gates of the Mericourts with a strange feeling of doubt and discouragement. He did not believe the old man, and yet he had no reason for not believing him. He returned to his hotel, wondering why those gates were closed and why Diane had not answered his letters.

The old servant, on re-entering the house, made his way to a room whose long windows overlooked the garden and the more distant trees of the Champs Elysees. The room was carpetless; it held nothing but a bookcase and a few old books, some pictures, a table, and two faded Louis Quinze chairs. In one of these chairs sat Catherine, Comtesse de Mericourt.

She looked keenly at the old servant.

"Who was it, Pierre?"

"An English monsieur, madame."

"Sir Stephen Erskine?"

"That was the name, madame."

"You said that we are not in Paris, and you sent him away?"

"I did so, madame."

The comtesse shook a finger at him.

"Pierre, that man must never enter

THE PRIDE OF THE MERICOURTS

here. You understand? Those are my orders."

The old servant bowed.

"I understand, madame."

As he went out he had a glimpse of Mademoiselle Diane coming in through the half-closed shutters from the garden. She was wearing a simple, white cotton dress, and her face looked as white as her dress. She crossed the room quickly to her mother, and Pierre, closing the door very gently, put his ear to the keyhole.

"It was he, maman?"

"Yes."

"And you sent him away?"

Pierre heard the comtesse's voice speaking in level, measured tones, just as though she were reading from a book, and her voice made Pierre shiver. He was devoted to both these women; he had waited ten years in order to serve them when they returned; he feared and admired the mother, but there was something in his poor old body that loved Diane.

"O, maman, I cannot bear it!"

"A daughter of the Mericourts bears anything. What! Did Gabrielle show fear? Where is the pride of the Mericourts?"

"Pride—oh—our terrible pride!"

The old lady's voice grew fierce.

"Our pride! It is all that is left to us. And shall I let this sleek, rich John Bull into our house and allow him to see our nakedness? 'Pah,' he will say, 'these people are as poor as rats.' And perhaps he will wish to be generous. I tell you that I will not have his pity or his patronage. *Mon Dieu*, no! A Mericourt never accepts pity."

"But, maman, he loves me."

"Yes! And he will despise us. Remember that English word—pauper? Will you be despised by him?"

"No," said the girl, "no. I too have the pride of the Mericourts."

And old Pierre sneaked away, looking very thoughtful and very sad.

Pierre knew in his heart that that Englishman would come again, and he felt afraid of him, perhaps because he had seen something in Erskine's eyes which seemed more strong than the pride of the Mericourts. Nor had Pierre to wait long for Erskine's second visit. The bell rang about ten o'clock next morning, and Pierre went to the gate.

"Good morning," said the Englishman. "I think we must have misunderstood each other yesterday. Am I correct in assuming that this is the house of the Comtesse de Mericourt?"

He was very polite, and his politeness made old Pierre's task less easy.

"That is so, monsieur."

"Madame la Comtesse and Mademoiselle Diane arrived from England about a month ago?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And they are now in the country?"

"Yes, in the country, monsieur."

Erskine smiled.

"Well, I have always heard so much from madame of the house and the furniture I should like to see them. I am sure that Madame la Comtesse would be delighted for me to look over the house. Come, now, I know that you will be proud to show me the beautiful house of the Mericourts."

He showed Pierre money, gold pieces, and the old man's knees knocked together; he was very agitated.

"Monsieur, pardon me, it is not possible."

"Not possible!"

"Madame la Comtesse left very definite instructions that no one was to be admitted."

Erskine withdrew his hand.

"Oh, that alters the situation," he said.

"I should not think of asking you to disobey your mistress. But tell me, Madame la Comtesse is at Mericourt—perhaps?"

"Yes, at Mericourt, monsieur," said Pierre, lying with facile helplessness.

Erskine turned away with an air of being satisfied.

"They are in that house," he thought; "I am sure of it. Why do they refuse to see me?"

He was puzzled, troubled, and he spent the rest of the morning wandering about Paris, and shortly before noon he found himself in the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal. Here Paris, the new Paris, showed herself in all her poignant contrasts, sadly shabby and basely opulent. Here were the carriages of the old noblesse occupied by the recently rich and the grossly great. Erskine had the impression of over-dressed women talking in loud voices. New men in very new uniforms showed off their complacency and their

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gold lace. It was not easy to tell whether you were looking at a minister's wife or at a demi-mondaine.

Erskine strolled along, looking at the shops. A jeweller's window attracted his attention, and he paused there, idly interested, a man whose thoughts were elsewhere. Suddenly his eyes sharpened. He frowned. He drew a little closer to the window, for lying there on a shield of green velvet he saw a necklace of rubies, the necklace of sacred memories which had belonged to Diane.

He was sure of it. He recognized the silver clasp, and the rather unusual setting of the stones, and so sure was he that he entered the shop and spoke to the jeweller.

"That necklace of rubies—is it for sale?"

The jeweller scented a rich Englishman.

"Why, certainly, milord."

"How much?"

The man named a price, and the magnitude of it made Erskine wonder how much the man had given the poor De Mericourts for the stones.

"I will buy it if you will tell me who sold it to you."

"But, monsieur," said the jeweller, "I cannot betray confidences."

"I will ask for no name. Was it a lady?"

"Yes, milord."

"A young lady, rather pale, with very dark eyes and hair?"

"Yes, milord"—and he gave a sympathetic shrug—"one of these poor aristos."

"When did she sell it to you?"

"Only three days ago, milord."

"I thought so," said the Englishman. "Will you send someone with me to my bankers. They shall pay you the money at once."

Erskine returned to the Rue St. Honoré that very afternoon and rang the de Mericourts' bell. Old Pierre looked frightened when he saw who was at the gate, but Erskine beckoned to him and smiled.

"You need not be alarmed, my friend. I have something to show you."

He brought a soft leather case out of his pocket, and showed Pierre dead Gabrielle's necklace.

"You recognize that?"

The old servant put a hand to his eyes.

"*Mon Dieu*, yes! But how did you come by it, monsieur?"

"I bought it this morning in a shop in the Palais Royal. Three days ago your mistress sold it to the jeweller."

Pierre stared at the Englishman, and suddenly the heart of him seemed to fail.

"I know that it is bad, monsieur, but I did not guess that it is as bad as this."

"My friend," said Erskine, "I love your mistress, and I wish her to be happy. I understand the pride of the Mericourts; I make my bow to it; but is this pride to starve the heart of Mademoiselle Diane? Come, now, you will open the gate."

Pierre burst into tears, but he produced the key.

"Madame is asleep, monsieur; she will call me a traitor, she will turn me away, but yet, I will do it, monsieur. They are starving."

He blundered, and took some time to find the keyhole.

"I offered Madame the little money that I have saved, monsieur, but no. Never have I seen her so angry. But she forgave me, for I was with the Mericourts when she was a little girl. She is asleep, monsieur, but Mademoiselle Diane—You will plead for me, monsieur?"

Erskine laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You shall never regret this," he said.

Pierre took him into the house, pointed to a door, and slipped away. Erskine opened the door and stood very still. He saw a girl on her knees on the floor with a little wooden coffer beside her and a few precious stones laid out on a white handkerchief. She looked up. Her eyes seemed to grow more black in her pale face. It was Diane.

The Englishman closed the door.

"Forgive me," he said.

Instantly she was on her feet, and standing with her back to the window, her white figure showing against the green of the trees. He saw her smile, a queer, mocking, tantalizing smile.

"I beg your pardon. But who are you, monsieur? Have you come from the jeweller's?"

Erskine looked her full in the eyes.

"The pride of the Mericourts," he said;

"am I not good enough to share it?"

He saw a faint flush colour her face.

He had broken in and discovered their poverty, their miserable poverty; he had



GASPARD DUCLAIR

By WARWICK DEEPING



EVERYBODY believed that old Gaspard Duclair was mad.

No sane man would have spent his time as he did puddling about in the old coach-house that he used as a laboratory and a workshop, making atrocious smells, neglecting to look after his men in the vineyards and gardens. Besides, he would spend hours lying flat on his stomach on the edge of the great water cistern, playing with absurd little tin and aluminium models that went splattering through the water and bumping against the concrete walls of the big cistern. Old Duclair was like a boy playing with a toy steamer. He would start his model, watch it with intense curiosity, and then go flapping excitedly round the bank to catch the toy on the other side.

He was a mild-looking old man with white hair and a face like "Jean Jacques." His knees rubbed together when he walked; his fingers were stained with chemicals; his eyelids were red, as though he sat up reading late into the night. He had been a professor at some provincial university before he had retired to this little patrimony of his on the Mediterranean with Susanne, his daughter, and Marthe, the old woman who kept his house.

No sane man could have been the father of Susanne. That is to say, no sane father could have suffered Susanne to behave like a wild English girl and do absolutely as she pleased. Neighbours pretended to be very concerned about Susanne, more especially as the young men thought her delightful.

"Where will the girl's dot be, with the old fool wasting his estate and letting things go to rack and ruin? Why doesn't he set about getting her betrothed? She is nineteen. Bless us, someone ought to speak to him on the matter."

A few worthy souls did attempt to give old Duclair advice, but he smiled at them, and was not to be worried.

"She will have her dot," he said, "and

some day I shall leave her a great deal of money. What! Her conduct is not seemly? She is just a bird that must use its wings."

For Susanne went to the dances at the casino at Beaurivage; she played tennis at the club with the young English; she went for scrambling picnics in the hills. Her hair was black as jackdaw's wings, and her skin like milk, and her eyes made the young Englishmen do absurd things "at the net." As for the English girls—they called her a "sport."

And so she was, a brave, frank, wholesome wench, with much of her father's hidden shrewdness hidden behind those rather mischievous eyes. She understood him. She may have laughed at him a little, but she believed him to be a great man.

Moreover, Raoul Busigny agreed with her, Raoul, the young electrical engineer, who may have been prejudiced in the professor's favour by Susanne's black eyes. Monsieur Busigny was very interested in Gaspard Duclair's experiments, but he was still more interested in Susanne.

"It swims, it swims—under the water—see!"

The professor was lying flat on his stomach on the edge of the great irrigating cistern, while Susanne sat in the grass under the shade of an orange tree. A long, cigar-shaped, silvery thing was glinting along under the water. It bumped against the farther wall, and rebounded, for its nose was protected by a spring capped with rubber.

Duclair went crawling round the cistern, his face radiant. And suddenly he sat back on his heels, staring at a man who had appeared from behind a group of young cypresses.

"It is you, Raoul. I was afraid for a moment——"

The engineer came forward, bare-headed. He was a tallish fellow, dark, serious, typical of the new France. He was a young man who meant to do things, a man who could be trusted.

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"I am a friend, sir. Susanne will answer for my honesty."

His eyes flashed a half-laughing look at the girl, but behind the laughter was devotion.

"Raoul could not cheat if he tried."

"No, no, he is *bien enfant*."

The machine in the cistern had turned itself and was cruising back towards old Duclair. He bent down as it came within reach, lifted it out, touched some spring that stopped the propeller whirling, and laid it on the grass.

"It goes, my friend, it is the success. The big fish is in the making—away yonder."

He rubbed his long hands together.

"Did you hear a little explosion down at Beaurivage last week, my son? To be sure, a stone pot went up into the air and broke some of the tiles on the roof. Marthe scolded me. I am terribly afraid of Marthe."

He grew serious of a sudden, and looked up questioningly at Raoul.

"Any news? Vienna was not happy with herself last week."

Busigny stared at the water.

"There is a little cloud that grows bigger," he said, "and it comes out of the north. These Germans—we are waiting."

He looked grim, almost fanatical, and Susanne was watching him.

"Raoul, you can hate; that pleases me."

His eyes met hers.

"Yes, I can hate," and she knew what he meant.

Raoul stayed to lunch, and they took it in the vine arbour outside the villa. Marthe had made one of her salads, and there was good red wine, but Raoul would talk of nothing but war.

"It will come," he said, "and the sooner the better. These swine must be taught to keep in their sties. Oh, yes. I shall not have far to go at first. I join down at Beaurivage when we mobilise."

And Susanne's black eyes encouraged and abetted him. She was La France.

"The boors! And to see them at our casino with their stupid, quarrelsome faces and dead fish eyes. Who does not want revenge!"

Old Duclair drank his wine and let them do the talking. He knew that these two young people were quite ready

to arrange things for themselves, and he was scandalously casual in being on their side. He liked Raoul, and the young man had a future.

But if Monsieur Busigny had hoped for ten minutes alone with Susanne, he was disappointed when the professor leant across the table and tapped him on the arm.

"My boy, I have something to show you. You will understand."

Busigny put a good face on it, and was marched off by the professor. Duclair went to his workshop, unlocked a safe that had been let into the wall, and took out a little metal box no bigger than a small nut. It had a small hole in it that was plugged by a piece of rubber.

"You see this, Raoul. In it are a few grains of something I have discovered. Well, you shall see, you shall see."

He took a length of fuse and a box of matches, and put them in his pocket, but the little metal case he carried carefully in his hand.

They went up through the vineyards to a wild piece of land, where oaks and chestnuts grew. Great stones lay about. The professor went about his work without any explanations. He scraped a small hole in the ground, laid the metal box in it, and connected up the fuse after withdrawing the rubber plug. Then he looked around for a big stone.

"This will do. Help me to lift it."

The stone was as much as they could manage between them. They let it down very gently over the hole where the metal box lay, so that the end of the fuse protruded.

Duclair produced his matches.

"You see that low wall over there? We will shelter behind that. Come along."

He had lit the fuse, and he caught Busigny by the arm, but he seemed in no great hurry to reach the wall.

"Wait, my son; just two or three grains of my new explosive in that little box."

They reached the wall, and Busigny was helping him over it when the thing happened. There was no great volume of sound, but just a rushing noise, and a cloud of dust and dirt. The great stone went up in the air as though thrown from a giant's hand. It rose for thirty feet or so, and, in falling, struck a chestnut tree

Gaspard Duclair

and neatly broke a big bough off from the trunk.

Old Duclair was delighted.

"You see, what a pretty toy."

"Mon Dieu, and you call that a toy, sir?"

"Just a pinch of dust in a little box under a stone. It is nothing."

He waved his arms.

"But think of ten kilograms of that explosive in the head of my new torpedo. It is all so light, you see; I could carry the thing under my arm."

"Thunder! but it would blow a battleship out of the water, split her in two."

Duclair's mild face beamed.

"Such things as these will make the barbarism of war impossible," he said.

Raoul had his chance with Susanne before he left Duclair's villa. She walked down the drive to the gate with him.

"Susanne, your father is a great man," he said solemnly.

She laughed.

"I knew that. But, Raoul, do you think there will be war?"

"I hope so," he answered, looking out over the sea.

Busigny's hope seemed prophetic, for in a week a European war was threatening; Germany was bellowing, brandishing her sabre, the great ogre, whom half the world longed to see trampled into the dust.

Old Duclair never seemed to trouble his head about international complications. He was in a fever of work, hammering away in his workshop. They could hardly drag him to his meals, and he was so pre-occupied that he had nothing to say. Marthe looked severe.

"I am very much afraid for his head," she confessed to some of her friends.

Rumours came and went; France was on the brink of mobilisation; she was being bullied and stormed at by her neighbour, but France was not to be flustered. If the Germans wanted war, they should have it, such a war as would never be forgotten.

It was Raoul who brought all the news to the Duclairs. Very often it was stale news, but what did that matter; young France wanted to talk, to feel the brave beating of its own heart.

"I believe they think we won't fight," he said to Susanne, "and they want to exasperate us into fighting. And we

have good friends; we shall not fight alone."

"You will be one of the first to go, Raoul."

"To be sure, and thank God for it."

Gaspard Duclair had been very excited all day; he had refused to come in to his midday meal, and Susanne had carried a tray into his workshop. He was putting the last touch to his torpedo, quite an insignificant-looking thing wedged between wooden blocks upon his bench.

Susanne went to spend the afternoon in a shady corner of the garden where she could look down on Beaurivage and the sea. There was to be a dance that night at the casino. Raoul could not go, which was disappointing, but Madame Bonnet had promised to take Susanne.

Susanne had a book with her under the shade of the trees, but she did not do much reading. She just dreamed of France, and war, and Raoul, and the Frenchmen who were waiting to teach those savages across the Rhine that France was not decadent, and not to be crushed.

Something attracted her attention. It was a faint trail of black smoke far out to sea. A big ship showed as a grey dot against the blue of the horizon where sea and sky met. Susanne watched it, with more and more interest as the thing grew bigger. It was no ordinary steamer this, but a grim, gaunt sinister craft. She could see the fighting tops, the great guns protruding from the turrets. The boat seemed to be coming in under full steam, ploughing along at full speed with a wash of foam in her wake. She showed no flag, and a strange silence seemed to follow her.

Susanne stood up. She knew some of the French battleships by sight, and this boat was like them, and yet different. Perhaps she was English or Italian.

The Dreadnought steamed close in to Beaurivage, and dropped her anchors. Susanne could see little black figures moving on her, but no bunting went up. The ship's silence was uncanny, almost threatening.

Half an hour later Susanne heard the iron gate clang. Someone was coming up the drive. She left the shelter of the trees, and saw Raoul Busigny.

He was in a state of excitement.

"Have you seen her?"

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"The ship?"

"Yes."

"Is she French, Raoul?"

"French! She's German; their crack ship, the *Strasbourg*. The devil take their insolence to send her cruising along here at such a time. It's a blow in the face—when they are threatening war."

"But she can't do any harm, Raoul."

"Harm! I'm wondering what she is here for, what their game is. They are capable of anything—these Germans. I shouldn't be surprised if they bombarded the coast just to give us the last flip."

"But our fleet is at Toulon."

"Is it? It was rumoured that they had steamed over to Algeria. Well, we shall see."

They went up to the villa and found something that surprised them. Old Duclair was standing on the veranda in his shirt sleeves and without a hat, staring at the German, and smiling a queer smile. He did not notice Susanne or Busigny till his daughter called to him.

"You are looking at the German, father."

"So she is German, is she? What is she doing here, Raoul?"

"That is what we are asking ourselves. They steamed in without a salute, without the flutter of a flag, silently, arrogantly. And there they are, anchored. I doubt whether it is safe for the beasts to come ashore."

Old Duclair nodded his head as though he understood.

"I must get back to work," he said. "Surely we shall be clever enough before long to rescue life from these barbarians."

He disappeared. Raoul was looking at the *Strasbourg*, his lips thin, his nostrils dilated.

"And they think we shall not fight. They think that they will have to spit in our faces. There is that dance to-night, Susanne; you are not going?"

"But I am."

"Stay here."

She laughed.

"But why should I not go? Come, Raoul, be reasonable. Do you think these Germans will land and carry us all off?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, it sounds dreadful nonsense, but I have had a strange feeling

ever since that ship steamed in. I cannot be there to-night—at the casino."

"If the German officers should come, do you think that I shall dance with them? No, no. I, too, can hate."

He caught her hand suddenly and kissed it.

"Susanne, do you know what I call you? Ma France. Yes, you are France to me."

"Then La Belle France shall go and dance at the casino, and if the Germans come she will look at them with scorn."

"I would rather Ma France stayed at home."

"Oh, come, come, would you have her a coward?"

"I would not have her so much as looked at by these German swine."

Nor could she tease him out of this fanatical mood, and he started back for Beaurivage with eyes that saw blood and fire.

It was sunset when old Duclair came out and closed the door of his workshop. His face was radiant, and he stood looking towards the west, his white hair shining in the sunlight.

"Good-bye, father; I am going now to Madame Bonnet's."

Susanne had come across the stone-paved yard, wrapped up in a black domino, a cerise-coloured veil over her head.

"Ah! dancing, is it?"

She kissed him.

"Do not work any more to-night, father; your eyes look so tired. Shall I stay and play to you?"

"By no means," he said. "I am very happy, child. I have much to think of, and it is good for youth to be gay."

She kissed him again, and he heard the rattle of wheels as the hired carriage that had been waiting for her at the gate drove off towards Beaurivage.

Half an hour later a letter came for Susanne. A boy brought it, but Susanne had gone. Marthe tucked it into the edge of the mirror that hung over the writing-desk in the dining-room. Marthe knew the writing, and she smiled.

"A love letter, of course. Well, he is a fine fellow."

Night came, a superb night, all a-glitter with stars, and Gaspard Duclair sat in the veranda, and looked down upon the lights of Beaurivage and dreamed.

Gaspard Duclair

He could even see the black bulk of the German ship lying less than a quarter of a mile from the shore. She showed few lights, but there was a sense of movement about her as though boats were coming and going.

The town down yonder seemed unusually noisy. People were shouting, but old Duclair took no note of it. He was dreaming dreams of destruction, dreams that should bring war to an end.

Suddenly the gate clanged; someone was running up the drive; the bell rang furiously. There were voices, Marthe's and a man's. Then Raoul Busigny came out upon the veranda.

"Susanne has gone?"

The professor sat up in his chair.

"To be sure."

"My God! did she not get my letter?"

"What letter?"

"I wrote imploring her not to go. Then she is at the casino?"

He walked up and down, while Duclair stared at him.

"What worries you, Raoul?"

"Worries me! Don't you know what has happened? It is incredible, but it is true. Those swine came ashore, the officers to the casino, the men to the cafés and the restaurants. They insulted our women at the casino; there was a row and a free fight. It was all part of a plan. Their sailors rushed in, threw all our men out, and kept the women. My God! they have threatened——"

He seemed to choke.

"And Susanne is there. I must go; we have sent for troops from the barracks; their sailors have been running amok in the streets. There will be fighting. What devilry! It is all part of a plan to drive us into war."

Old Duclair had risen. His hands were clenched; he was looking in the direction of the German ship.

Then he spoke.

"Go, my son; bring Susanne back to me. The hand of God shall be upon these boasters."



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Raoul hardly waited to hear him, nor did he attach any significance to Gaspard Duclair's words. He started running towards Beaurivage, thinking of Susanne and those French women trapped in the casino, and threatened with monstrous things by those bullies who wore swords and called themselves men of honour.

Old Duclair had gone into the house. He took an electric torch from a cupboard and made his way across the yard to his workshop. No one saw him unlock the door, and emerge with a queer-looking burden wrapped in canvas. He hoisted it on to his shoulder, passed round the house and down the drive into the road.

His neighbours might call Gaspard Duclair an old ass, but he was a sure-footed beast who knew all the paths leading down through the gardens and vineyards to the sea. He met no one. Everybody appeared to have rushed down to Beaurivage.

The path joined a river and followed it towards the sea. There were some boatmen's cottages here sheltered from the north wind by a belt of stone pines, and what was of more importance to Gaspard Duclair, a little stone quay where boats were moored. He made his way cautiously towards the cottages. There were lights in some of the windows, and a group of women were standing and talking together excitedly.

"Well, if the men have gone, I'm going, too. Let me get my hands on a German!"

"Come along, Marie."

"We shall see some fun."

And off they went into the night with a clattering of wooden shoes along the rough path.

Duclair went straight to the quay and saw what he desired to see, two or three boats moored to an iron ring, swaying gently, and rubbing against each other like beasts tightly packed in a stable.

Old Duclair drew one close in. It was a rather ticklish business embarking with that machine of his, but he managed it in safety, and stowed the torpedo in the bottom of the boat, wedging it with his top coat and sacking that he found. Then he unmoored, poled out with an oar, and stood up to get his bearings.

There were the lights of Beaurivage to guide him, and he fancied that he could

see a dim black mass looming up out of the sea opposite the town. Duclair could handle a boat, and he stood to his oars after the fashion of a Neapolitan, facing the way the boat was going.

Suddenly a great arm of light came sweeping along the shore, making a white glare, a wedge of brilliance between the blackness on either side of it. Houses, trees, rocks gleamed up for a moment, and were gone again. Then old Duclair found himself under the eye of the *Strasbourg's* searchlight.

It blinded him, but he just paddled on unconcernedly as though he were no more than a harmless fisherman out to trail lines. The grey eye covered him with its glare for a few seconds, and then swept on.

When the blink was out of his eyes Duclair could see the black bulk of the battleship lying broadside towards him not a quarter of a mile away. The lights of Beaurivage helped to show it up. The sea was wonderfully still, calm as the starlit sky overhead.

Once more the *Strasbourg's* searchlight swept around, covered Duclair and his boat for a moment, and passed on. That little black dot might well have seemed a negligible quantity to the men watching behind that light.

Gaspard Duclair smiled to himself. He was blind to everything save the sinister outlines of the great ship. Beaurivage was in an uproar, but it is doubtful whether old Duclair's ears took note of it. The boat glided nearer and nearer. He could see the black guns thrusting out of the turrets, the huge funnels, the masts and gear.

Suddenly he stopped rowing, and let the boat swing round till her stern was towards the *Strasbourg*. He shipped his oars, and knelt down in the bottom of the boat. His hands trembled a little, but his smile was a smile of exultation.

Beaurivage, that quiet, white, pleasure-loving town was out of its senses, mad, possessed. Angry crowds were rushing hither and thither; women leant out of windows and screamed at those below. Now and again there was the crack of a revolver, an ominous sound in a town that was supposed to be at peace.

In the main street leading to the sea front an orderly black mass of men was retreating steadily towards the sea, while

Gaspard Duclair

an impotent and raging crowd, wild-faced and furious, followed close behind. These German sailors were laughing and joking with one another. They had had their sport at the town's expense. They had spat in the face of France, and the insult would serve.

But down from Mont Bourboul, where the barracks stood, French infantry were pouring, thick-set little chasseurs in their dark blue uniforms and caps. A number of civilians marched with them, Frenchmen who knew what this affair heralded. Raoul Busigny was with the troops.

They came round by the harbour to the headland where the casino stood, a building of glittering lights half hidden among palms, and pines, and mimosa trees. The iron gates were shut, and a French crowd howled outside. There were German sailors with rifles on guard in the gardens.

But a crowd of men had picked up great baulks of timber from the harbour quay. The iron gates were smashed open. The blue-coated chasseurs went through them at the double.

There was no shouting, no clamour, but just an orderly swirl of figures in the gardens. The *Strasbourg* men were engulfed, swallowed up, smothered. It was done grimly, efficiently, with no suggestion of disorder.

Busigny was one of the first men to reach the casino steps. A German officer stood just outside the door; two or three others were laughing and talking loudly in the vestibule.

The German at the top of the steps pulled out a revolver, but he was given no chance to bluster. The civilian crowd had armed itself with stones, bottles, billets of wood. The German was smothered, knocked flat; there was a crashing of glass, one fierce shout, and the crowd poured into the casino.

The gaming rooms were empty, the green tables deserted; a few smashed chairs lay about, the wreckage of the previous scuffle. Folding doors led through into the ballroom, and these doors were closed.

Raoul was one of the first to reach them, but the doors held against their efforts.

"Bring up one of the tables."

One of the heavy gaming tables was rushed forward, and used as a ram

against the doors. One charge sent them flying apart, and Raoul found himself in the ballroom opposite a group of German officers who had drawn their swords.

Huddled in the far corner of the ballroom were a crowd of girls and women, and among them Raoul saw Susanne.

The crowd had swept in, and surged round the Germans, who kept a space clear about them with their drawn swords. Women's voices joined in the uproar, the voices of women who had been mocked and insulted.

Raoul found himself holding Susanne's hands.

"What has happened?"

Her eyes were flashing.

"What we have had to bear. Pah! And these men? No, no, only kisses, mockery, threats——"

A captain of chasseurs had entered the room with a stream of soldiers following him. The crowd made way, swayed back into the corners.

The captain of chasseurs was very grim, very cool, and desperately polite.

"Gentlemen, this is a very strange affair. I have to warn you that you are my prisoners."

A lieutenant, a big man, answered him insolently.

"Clear the crowd out of the way. We do not want to soil ourselves with these civilians."

The captain looked at him grimly.

"Gentlemen, I am here to offer you a safety that you do not deserve. Surrender to me, or I will not answer for the consequences, nor shall I offer to interfere."

Men were still trying to pour into the ballroom, but the soldiers kept them back, yet the great room was full enough to bring a circle of ominous faces within arms' length of the Germans. And they were very terrible, and so very quiet, those French faces. There would be one fierce struggle, and then—silence; and perhaps those Germans saw death in the eyes of the crowd.

The senior officer shrugged his big shoulders, laughed, and spoke in French.

"If you will clear a path, sir, we will be getting back to our ship. And I would warn these people that they had better behave themselves, or our guns will be shelling Paris before the month is out."

Cassell's Magazine of Fiction

Dead silence had fallen. The French captain's face was white, but not with the pallor of fear. He knew what issues were at stake, and he was fighting desperately to keep his temper.

He looked round at the faces of his brother Frenchmen.

"Gentlemen——"

But he got no further, for the whole casino shook with the vibrations of a huge explosion. Windows crashed in; glass came falling from the domes on the crowd below; the sound had been so violent that men stood dazed, giddy, half sick with the shock of it.

Then there was a rush for the door, but the captain of chasseurs and his men threw themselves round the Germans.

"Your ship is firing on us!"

The Germans stared at him stupidly.

"It is impossible. That was not the report of a gun."

Raoul and Susanne found themselves part of a crowd that was rushing through the gardens towards the sea. They held hands. Men were shouting hoarsely as they ran.

"Are they bombarding us?"

"Her magazine has blown up."

"It is a judgment of God."

Raoul and Susanne reached the terrace overhanging the sea where the casino gardens ended. It was a silent, awed, and astonished crowd that gathered there in the darkness. Men and women stared, and said nothing, for the cries were terrible that came from over yonder.

They could see the black mass of the *Strasbourg*, her masts and funnels slanting at a sharp angle, volumes of smoke pouring from her hull. She was heeling right over, and settling down. The cries that came from her were never likely to be forgotten by the crowd in the casino gardens.

Susanne and Raoul were standing close together under the shade of an ilex. Raoul's arm was about her, his eyes were grim.

"What has happened? Has she blown up?"

"There is no wreckage about. These gardens would have been littered with it. Susanne, have you forgotten your father?"

He felt her whole body quiver.

"My God! Raoul, do you think——"

"I could swear to it. The *Strasbourg* was struck by a torpedo charged with some extraordinary new explosive. And I happen to know——"

She clung to him.

"Look, look! She is sinking."

They saw the black mass roll right over till her masts and funnels were lost in the sea, her hull looking like the back of a monster whale. Then, quite suddenly, she glided forward, dipped, and disappeared.

A strange cry rose from the crowd, a cry that was a mingling of horror, pity, and exultation.

"It is the hand of God!"

But other cries rose from the hearts of the people.

"The poor wretches. They are drowning like rats. To the rescue!"

Raoul found that Susanne was weeping.

"Go! help save some of them."

He bent and kissed her.

"Susanne, I love you. I will go. Wait here for me."

The dawn was coming up before Raoul and Susanne returned to old Duclair's villa on the hills. They went through the garden hand in hand, very grave, yet strangely happy.

In the veranda an old man was sitting in a chair, and staring out over the sea. His face looked grey and tranquil in the light of the dawn.

"My father——"

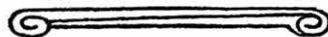
She threw herself on her knees before him, and he gathered her in his arms.

"Child, God kills in order that men may live. Ah, Raoul, my son, what do you say?"

"It will mean war."

Gaspard Duclair stretched out his thin arms.

"War, let it come, for it shall be a war that shall teach men to live in peace. I have dreamed a dream, and yet it is no mere dream. Out of the blood of the nations, pity and peace and wisdom shall arise. May God forgive me for what I have done. The arrogant men shall be humbled, and the eyes of the whole world be opened."



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(NEW SERIES)

THE YELLOW HOUSE WITH THE WHITE STEPS

By WARWICK DEEPING

GABRIELLE MORISINI stood waiting at the doorway of her husband's bedroom.

She had his keys in her hand, and she held them as a woman holds something that is unclean. Her dark eyes looked at the yellow wall of the house across the street, but she did not see the wall nor the strip of blue Roman sky above it. She was a woman who paused and remembered, a young woman whose memories were ironical and very sad. So much had happened in seven years. Those quiet days in a Breton convent school seemed like the green idyl of some long forgotten spring. Then this man, her husband, had come into her life and plucked her away like a white rose because of her beauty. She had touched the deeps within him, learnt disillusionment, and now he was lying in that inner room, a thing of dissipation and delirium, a thing that coughed and panted and babbled unclean words.

The doctor came out, closing the door softly. He was a debonair and imperturbable little man with a quiet but decisive voice.

"No, there is no change, signora."

She looked at him with her soft, frank eyes.

"How long will it be?"

"I cannot say. My impression is that he will recover."

She raised her hand and showed him the keys.

"It is very awkward. I do not wish to meddle with my husband's affairs, and yet—"

He understood her.

"Of course. But the responsibility is yours; it is thrust upon you. Life

has to go on, signora, and one has to pay one's bills."

She didn't answer his smile, and he passed on into the living room of the little flat, picked up his hat and gloves and bowed to her.

"I shall be here this evening."

"Thank you. You have been very kind."

Gabrielle Morisini stood and stared for a while at the heavy cabinet made of chestnut wood in which Dominico Morisini kept his money and his papers. It was part of the mystery of the man, part of the mystery of his life, for her husband was still a mystery to Gabrielle, an enigma that had long since inspired a contemptuous mistrust. She knew that he was a dissipated and irresponsible cynic who did not work but who never lacked for money. She had always wondered about that money and shrunk from it, she knew not why.

Decision came to her with a flash of impatience. She tried various keys before she found the right one and the cabinet stood open. Her curiosity boasted a conscience, even though it had hesitated so long. She had felt implicated in the man's secrecy, tainted by it, and her pride challenged her mistrust.

It was an illuminating hour for her, the more so because it left her groping towards further mysteries. She found money—plenty of it—letters, letters that she glanced at and put fastidiously aside. A little black leather dispatch-box brought her puzzlement and an intent frown, for in it she found a queer, stumpy notebook bound in red and black leather, and for a while she

could make nothing of its contents. Suddenly she grasped them and understood. The book was a code and cipher manual, written in a neat Teutonic hand—the dictionary by which a certain secret language could be disentangled and translated.

When the little Italian doctor came that evening she went with him into her husband's room and stood beside the nurse who was on duty. Morisini's thin and rather mean face looked flushed and wet. He lay propped up on pillows, panting, and his wide eyes saw nothing.

The doctor studied him a moment, one hand on the man's wrist. He nodded to the nurse, who brought her temperature chart. Gabrielle watched them. She avoided glancing at her husband.

"The pulse is no worse."

"No; it has been better, doctor."

"And the breathing is not quite so hurried."

Afterwards, in the living-room, he glanced with critical sympathy at Morisini's wife.

"It is still doubtful. We are near the crisis, and the decision will be quick and final. Have you been out to-day?"

"Out of the house?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Dear lady, it is necessary. Go at once into the garden, you have an hour before sunset."

"I will go," she said.

Gabrielle craved for space, height, distance, an hour's aloofness from the ugly cynicism of a life that was becoming unbearable, and she found the atmosphere she craved for on the terrace of St. Pietro in Montorio. The west was all red, the city below her drenched in golden light, the distant hills like amethysts in a ring of tarnished silver. An opalescent haze hung over the Campagna, and Rome itself seemed strangely still.

She found more than a beautiful atmosphere on that lofty terrace. Someone came and stood near her by the wall, someone who looked at her tentatively and with a quick gleam of recognition.

"I did not know you were in Rome."

She turned sharply, conscious of a pleasant memory and finding it there in the flesh.

"You?"

She saw him as she had seen him so often on the courts of the Riviera, battling in some tough match, always imperturbable and good-tempered, head up, blue eyes steady.

"Well, and why not?"

A light came into her eyes, and the beautiful pallor of her face caught some of the colour of the sunset. For these two, the Englishman and the French wife of a cosmopolitan adventurer, had liked each other not a little. They had played tennis and climbed the hills together that last winter, and the memory haunted them both.

"And why are you in Rome?"

Roger Fielding was looking at her with the inward intentness of a man whose eyes see more than a casual woman casually met.

"I have business here."

"I thought tennis and mountain climbing were your business."

"I have a thing that we call a brain even though I am English."

"Please don't use satire, it hurts."

And suddenly he was strangely touched. She had turned, and was looking over the city, and he was conscious of an indefinable sadness in her, a something near to tears. She seemed lost in a momentary abstraction, her mouth plaintive, her pride drooping very wearily.

"I'm sorry. There are some people to whom one never wishes to be satirical. It seems a long time since that day we climbed to St. Agnese."

"You remember it?"

"I do not forget such days," he said.

Her face remained slightly averted.

"Yes; and to some of us they do not come very often. Do you remember when you were young thinking that life would be like that?"

She pointed to the city and all the glamour of the spring sunset.

"Some of it is still like that," he answered.

"What a boy you are! I have to go back now to the real life, the realities one does not see from the terrace of St. Pietro in Montorio. Shall you be in Rome long?"

"As long as I please, perhaps."

"How delightful to be able to come and go as you please!"

He was conscious of her as a woman with a tragedy, and the impression was so vivid and poignant that the man in him was deeply moved. That sallow, little oblique-eyed husband of hers with his rings and his eyeglasses and cynical red mouth had always smelt of the world's uncleanness. What a mockery!

She was smiling at Fielding and holding out her hand.

"Good-bye."

His eyes looked into hers.

"Is not that a slip of the tongue? Supposing you allow me to imagine that this is the mule-path down from St. Agnes?"

"Would it please you?"

"Yes."

Fielding walked with her as far as the house in the Via Lucida, and before he left her he knew that her husband was near death, yet he had the impression that it was his life and not his death that constituted her tragedy. She was a little cynical and correct when she spoke of Morisini as though her self-restraint made her conventional and cold.

"Good-bye. May I see you again?"

"Perhaps. There might be a second coincidence."

"I should be very grateful for it. I hope all this worry of yours will pass."

Any man with a sensitive pride could understand how Gabrielle Morisini's curiosity was part of her conscience. The voice that continually said, "Search, discover," urged a moral act. She was in religious revolt against the half-discovered treachery of her husband's life.

The postman had left a small flat parcel for Morisini, and his wife found it lying on the table. The handwriting of the address struck her as being strangely familiar, and next moment she was remembering that little book bound in red and black leather.

She cut the string and unfastened the wrappings, to find nothing more than a photo, the photo of a big bluff German, bristle-headed, double-chinned, smiling full at the camera with an air of sentimental good humour. On the back of the cardboard mount was written "From Fritz." There was hatred

and a suggestion of fear in her eyes as she looked at the man's face. She knew him so well, this Fritz Biedermann, big, bluff, hearty, rich, whom most people thought such a thundering good fellow. He had tried to make love to her, the love that pulls at a pocket-book and offers money.

A flash of anger, a sudden storm of impatience with the life she had to lead, made her tear the thing across. Next moment she was staring at the torn edges. The photo had bulged from the cardboard mounting, and there was something between them, the frayed edges of a piece of greyish paper.

Morisini's wife sat up half that night in her bedroom. She had drawn the curtains so that the light should not show in the street, and the little red and black book was in her hands. She was past weariness when the thing was done, and that piece of grey paper had rendered up its secret. She knew now why Fritz Biedermann was her husband's friend and whence Morisini got his money. Yet these sordid secrets were mere details. Beyond them loomed a great horror, treacheries foreshadowing a vast cataclysm, a world assassination, and she saw all this with the eyes of a Frenchwoman, the girl who had dreamed dreams in a Breton convent. She sat there musing, bleak-faced, distraught. Her conscience was putting on its armour.

Gabrielle did not enter her husband's room, but she waited for the verdict, sitting calmly in a chair by her favourite window, the window that gave her a glimpse of the cypresses in a neighbouring garden.

"The crisis occurred last night. It is over. Your husband will recover."

The doctor's voice seemed to come from a distance. She sat there staring out of the window, her face strangely hard and calm. The message was oracular, or like the pronouncing of a doom. She saw her immediate destiny as clearly as one sees a white stone lying on a green hillside.

"I am glad to know. Does he understand things yet?"

"Yes; but it is essential that he should not be worried."

"I understand that perfectly."

The doctor looked at her as a student

of the emotions, admired her self-control and bowed himself out.

That evening she climbed the steps to St. Pietro in Montorio and found Roger Fielding waiting on the terrace. Her mood was a curious mingling of romance and cold finality. She had made a decision, and she knew in her heart that nothing would alter it, but for the moment she hesitated like a hunter with rifle poised. She watched to see the whole shape of the beast, make sure of it before she fired.

Fielding surprised her.

"He is better."

"How do you know?"

"I know, that is all."

She smiled rather wanly.

"How did you manage to play such grim tennis? They called you the Rock. Rocks are not subtle."

His eyes had a sudden shine in them.

"When one talks flippantly one is on the edge of big things. Yet a man has to wait."

"For what are you waiting?"

"I am waiting for you to trust me."

The audacities of some men are never impertinent, and a woman judges a man by her knowledge of his self-restraint.

"I am troubled about my husband," she said suddenly; and before Fielding left her that evening he knew a part of the truth.

Each day that followed had its incident for Gabrielle. She found herself standing at the foot of her husband's bed, very calm and cold and wondering, as she had often wondered, what madness on her mother's part had made her marry him.

"You are better? Dr. Fernandi says that you are out of danger."

"Yes, I am better."

He was very weak and fretful, but he did not play for her sympathy. He was a little afraid of her and ill at ease.

"Has anyone called?"

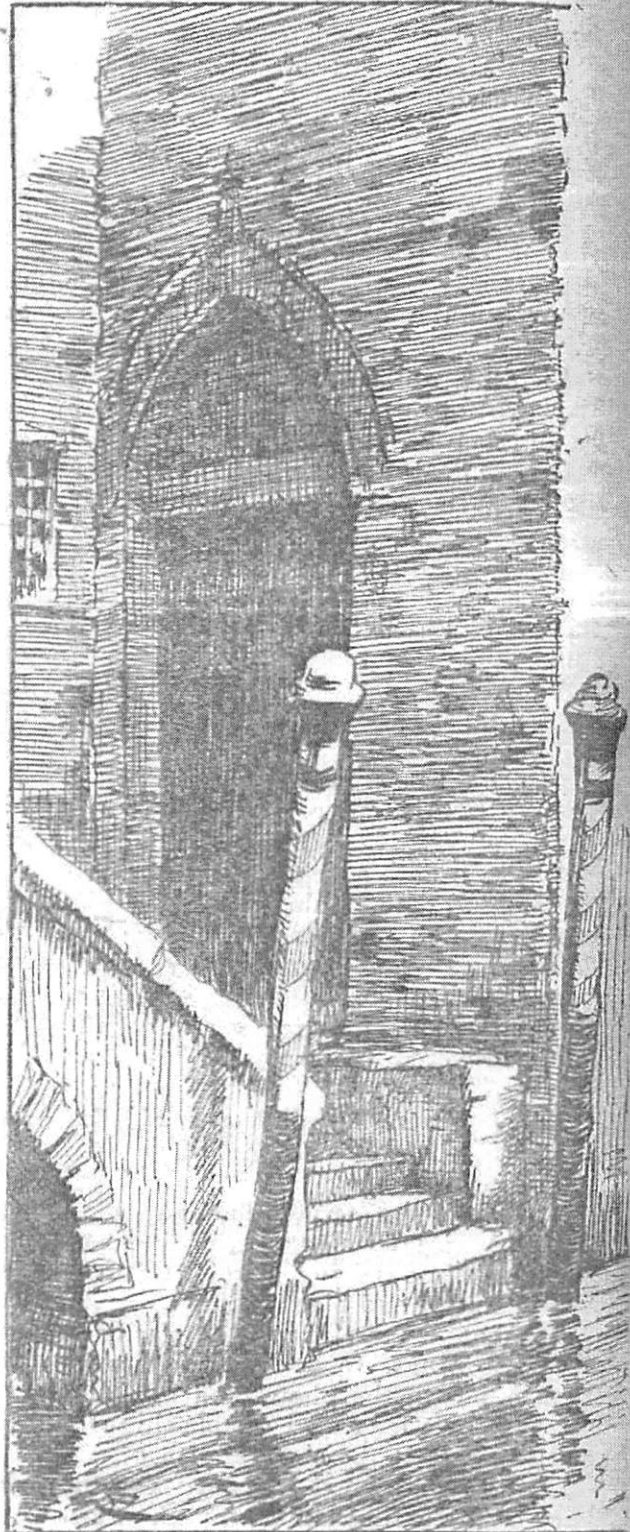
"No one."

"And there have been no letters?"

"None for you," she answered.

In three days Morisini was sitting up, and the lust to get well was a fever in him.

He asked for his keys, and was given them, though he seemed to shrink from any comment on their having been taken away. He was always asking for letters and glancing at his wife



"His eyes met Gabrielle's"

with oblique mistrust when she gave him some evasive answer.

Gabrielle was waiting, and one morning the post brought her the final message. She opened the little parcel in her room. It contained a popular book on motoring and a jocular note from Fritz Biedermann, but when she

cut away the paper from one of the boards of the cover she found the thing for which she had waited.

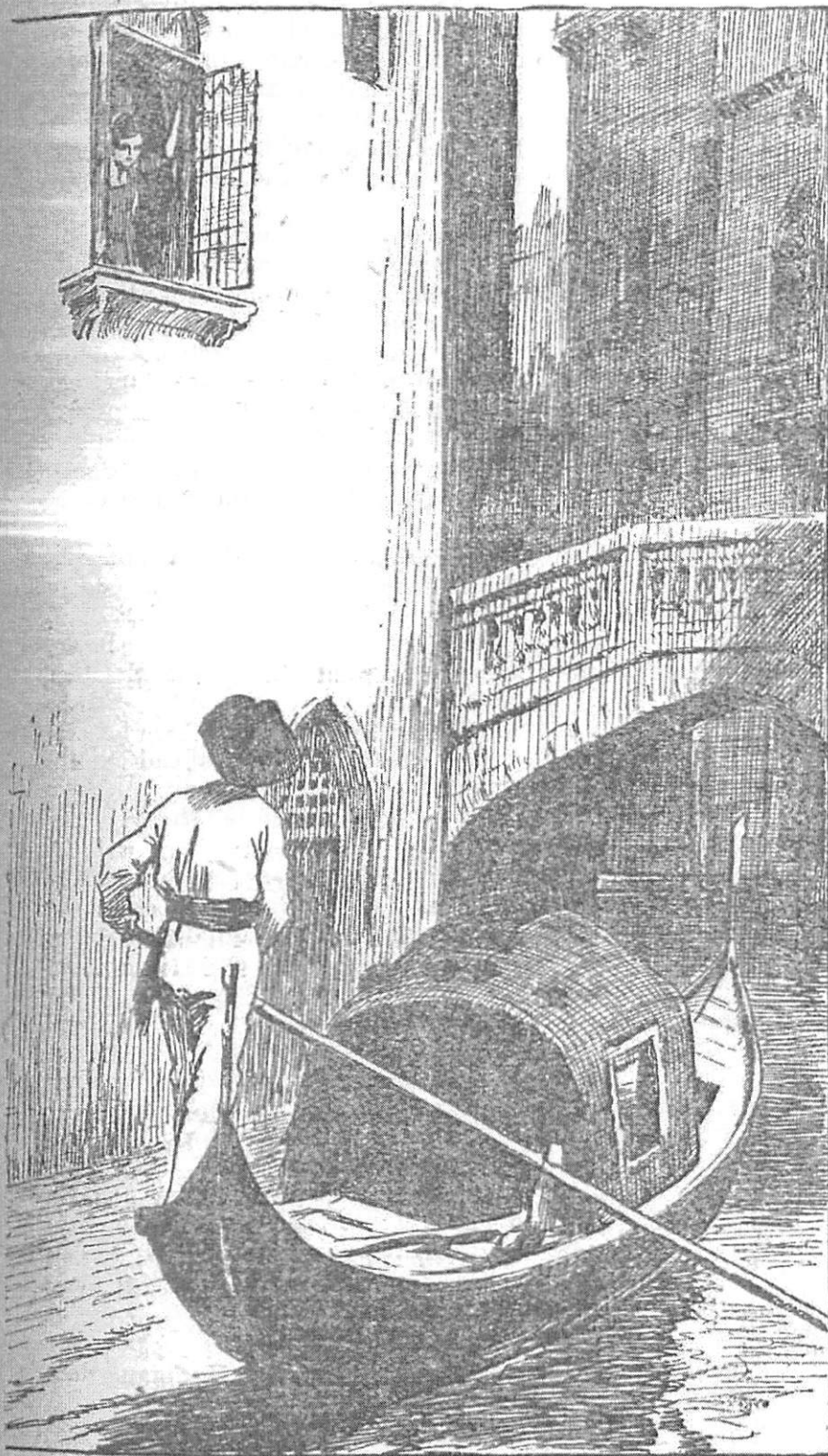
The red and black book gave her the cipher, and her face grew more serious and set as she disentangled the message. This was no mere sinister sketching of events that were to happen

within the next three months. Written here were cold, clear, and definite orders — "You will do this" and "You will do that," and she knew that these orders meant assassination and war.

When Gabrielle had deciphered the whole of it she made a little parcel of the two books and Biedermann's torn photo and hid it away among her winter clothes. Then she sat down again and wrote a note to Fielding at his hotel.

"You asked me to trust you. Will you come to me here at ten o'clock to-morrow? I know that you will not fail."

She was a woman armed, and Dominico Morisini was to see the white blaze of her armour. He had tried to dress himself on that fatal morning when she entered his room, and she found him sitting on the side of his bed



and thrilled her even at that distance"

and carefully waxing his little black moustache.

She was very quiet and mercilessly calm, and her calmness alarmed him. He tried to parry it with a jocular gaiety.

"All dressed up and ready to go out?"

"Yes."

"And who is the happy man in whose honour?"

"I am going to the French Legation."

She saw him hold his breath and stiffen. His face seemed to grow thinner and more mean.

"To lunch, eh?"

"No, to prevent men being killed and a country devastated."

He sprang up, shaking and screaming like an hysterical girl.

"What do you mean? I forbid you to go. It is all nonsense."

She looked at him with such scorn and such steadfastness that he knew that the end had come.

"There have been letters. Where are those letters?"

"I shall not tell you."

He lurched towards her, tottered, fell sideways on the bed and lay there panting.

"It's a lie—a damned lie! I'll explain—I'll explain everything."

She closed the door on him, glanced at her wrist watch and walked out of the flat.

Fielding met her on the stairs, and she looked to him like the figure of France—pale, dark-eyed, implacable.

"You will come with me?"

"Anywhere."

"It is to the French Legation."

A new alertness showed on his brown face.

"That's queer, very queer. I'm playing in this big game; it's bigger than tennis."

"You?"

"That's not the reason why I am here, Gabrielle. I'm not that sort of beast. But, good God!"

She opened her vanity bag as they went slowly down the stairs and took out the little parcel that held the books and papers.

"You asked me to trust you. Take this. It is proof of everything; it may be better that I should not carry it.

But oh, my friend, that a woman should have to play the spy because her conscience drives her!"

He took the parcel, raised her gloved hand and kissed it.

"I can guess where the honour lies, and your honour rests with me."

These two had hardly turned out of the Via Lucida when a big grey closed car pulled up outside the flats and an unwieldy man in a blue suit climbed out of it. He was brisker on his feet than his bulk suggested, and he went up the steps with the speed of a young man.

"The devil! So you are here!"

"Biedermann! Come in quick."

The big German had blundered into a tottering, grey-faced man at the top of the stairs, a man who clutched at him and gabbled.

"Thunder! What's the matter, Nico?"

"I've been ill, nearly dead. She got hold of my keys. Did you send any letters?"

Biedermann glared, swept him through the doorway and closed the door.

"Letters? Of course, and I had no acknowledgment. That's why I am here. But what the devil do you mean?"

"She must have stopped those letters, got hold of the cipher and read them."

"What? And who is 'she'?"

"Gabrielle."

"You sot! Where is your wife?"

"Gone to the French Legation. It can't have been ten minutes since she left here. She knows everything, Fritz, if there was anything serious in those letters."

"Serious? Thunder! There was everything in them! Those letters must never get to the Legation."

He was savage, a tempest of a man, like some old Berserker. He put one arm round Morisini, threw the door open, and carried him down the stairs as a child might carry a doll.

"My car is here. A drive will do you good, my friend. And we shall have Father Hoffman with us."

"Hoffman!"

"She does not know Hoffman, does she? The devil take all women!"

At the French Legation Fielding and Morisini's wife were standing in the

vestibule looking into each other's eyes and talking softly together.

"I know these people. Why not let me do all this beastly business for you?"

His strength and the tenderness behind it were dominating her. She felt very weary, very ready to let the burden of it slip into his hands.

"But why should you?"

"I could give you the greatest reason in the world, but that must wait."

She flushed and her eyes softened.

"Well, I surrender."

"Sit down there and wait. I want to save you from being dragged into it if possible."

Fielding was climbing the stairs when the grey car stopped at the gate of the Legation. A priest emerged from it, a glossy, rosy-faced old cleric with the mildest of blue eyes and a good smile.

He spoke to the porter:

"Has a lady called here, a young lady—rather tall and dark?"

The porter was laconic and polite.

"I think she is waiting in the vestibule, signor."

"Thank you; I have called for her. Her husband, who is an invalid, is waiting in the car."

This piece of benignity toddled into the vestibule and presented himself with a bow to Gabrielle.

"Signora Morisini?"

She stared at him.

"Yes."

"Signora, will you speak to your husband for a moment before he leaves Rome? Yes, yes; this lamentable business! He had sent for me and I find him a broken man. Signora, you can trust me."

"Where is my husband?"

"I have him in a car at the gate. Afterwards he goes to the station. Believe me, one moment of mercy will not be wasted."

She gave a little shrug of the shoulders, rose and went with him. Meanwhile, the porter, who was an inquisitive soul, noticed the bristling head and red face of a big man at the near window of the car. The priest and the lady passed him, and he turned to stare at them as they passed.

The door of the car opened, and the porter concluded that the lady was

going to enter it. The conclusion was justified, but the method astonished him, for Father Hoffman's hands became the hands of an ordinary un-Christian man and there was some force within the car that was even more forcible than the priest.

"*Sapristi!* Stop, you pigs!"

But the car moved off and carried those momentary glimpses of a struggle with it, glimpses of a woman overpowered, choked and thrust down by rough hands out of sight.

Ten seconds later he was facing Roger Fielding, a very angry man with blue eyes that stared.

"What? Taken away by force?"

"Yes, signor."

"And what were you doing?"

"I was surprised, signor. There was a priest and a big man in the car with the face of a German."

"The car had a number?"

"I forgot to notice it, signor—it was a big grey car."

"Oh, to the devil with you!"

In a little waterway off the Grand Canal at Venice stood a house with white steps going down to the green water, a house whose walls were the colour of yellow sand. It had queer round-headed windows fitted with white and yellow sun-blinds, and a great gondola post painted red stood at the bottom of the white steps.

In the salon of the house two men sat talking. They had drawn their chairs to the window, and the stars showed in the deep blue-black sky.

"So she swears that she has burnt them?"

"Swears to it."

"Yet I would not trust any woman, Nico. Your life is not worth it, my friend, for we hold yours in pawn."

Morisini squirmed in his chair.

"And people think you such a roaring good fellow."

Biedermann beamed.

"And so I am, Nico; but sometimes it is necessary to be brutal. Look at the matter honestly. She showed no disinclination to betray you, eh? It will have to be done, my friend; it will have to be done."

The Italian bit at his moustache.

"What a devil you are. I could swear she is sorry."

"You fool; she hates you. We are taking no more chances; the business is too big to be spoilt by a woman's tongue. And, mind you——"

He leant over and beat with his fist on the arm of Morisini's chair as he talked to him, like a smith hammering on an anvil.

Morisini shrank and crumpled. His chin seemed to lose itself in his collar; he was sick and afraid.

"But how? Do you expect me——"

"A little diplomacy, my friend, a little softness. We will spoil her a little, keep up appearances, and then one evening you will take her on the lagoon and there will be an accident."

"How?"

"I will arrange it; I know the men. But no puppy tricks, dear friend, or you will go down too with a stone round your neck. We should see to it. I should be sorry, for you are useful."

At the window of an upper room Morisini's wife sat, looking at the same stars.

She was a woman in whom a great fear struggled with her pride, for she was a prisoner in this Venetian house, and the house was Fritz Biedermann's. She had been crushed, drugged, smuggled into the place, stormed at, bullied, tormented by the emotional outbursts of her husband. She knew her danger, and had tried to see it with calmness and even with stoicism, telling herself that Roger Fielding had the greater issue in his hands, and that her own life was a mere white feather on the waters.

But she wanted to live. Life cried out in her with a new yearning, and this house in Venice smelt of death. She could hear the murmur of the two men's voices, and instinct told that their words concerned her. She had got herself tangled up in all their secret machinery, and she knew how brutal Biedermann's hands could be.

"The signora will take coffee in bed?"

It was the German maid standing at her bedside next morning.

"Yes."

This was her sixth day in the house, and Gabrielle prepared to spend it as she had spent the others, sitting at her window, listening, thinking, pretending to read. Gondolas passed below,

but her window was high up and away from the life of the water-city. She would sit and listen to the faint lapping of the water against the walls after a gondola had passed, and sometimes she would bend forward and look out.

This day was to be different. She was at the window, looking out, when a long black gondola swung into view, breaking all the many-coloured reflections in the water and disturbing the shadows so that they broke and moved like live things. The boat came along lazily, the gondolier, a tall man with a red sash round his waist, swinging his body very gently against the oar. He was whistling some carnival song, and staring up dreamily at the sky and the houses as though life had no hurry for him on such a June day.

His eyes met Gabrielle's, and thrilled her even at that distance. There was something familiar about the figure, an indescribable something.

He passed with his gondola, and in half an hour he returned, looking up in the same casual and dreamy way. There was just the momentary stare of the eyes under the slouch hat, no change in the gentle, rhythmic swinging of his body, nothing to mar the casualness of it all.

A little later her husband was standing in her room, suave, dandified, vaguely apologetic.

"Fritz is going. We are all rather desolated by what has happened, and Fritz is a good soul when people do not tread on his feet."

"And he is going—where?"

"To Vienna. He is leaving us his house and servants for a fortnight. We have prepared a little lunch of reconciliation. I go with Fritz to the station, and perhaps in the cool you would care to wander and look at the shops? Do not quarrel with a small peace offering."

She remained stiff and silent for a moment. He had slipped a bundle of notes under the writing-pad on her table.

"I have been a bad girl, is that it, and Fritz wants to forgive me?"

Her voice was very level and unstrained.

"Of course. Who wants to quarrel with a very charming woman?"

She mistrusted them utterly, but her fear and her new joy in life cried out in her and urged dissimulation.

In the blue salon Fritz Biedermann bowed over her hand.

"I am a barbarian, signora, and I have the faults of a barbarian; a wild beast when I am angry, but a beast that bears no malice."

He was all smiles and conciliation, the good fellow ready to be generous. Gabrielle made herself smile.

"It will take many months, Herr Fritz, to wipe away that memory."

"Then let it be months," he said with ponderous gallantry. "I shall not grumble."

They lunched and even made a show of being merry, and the afternoon brought other happenings. Biedermann and Morisini went off to the station, and about five o'clock Müller, the confidential Müller, presented himself.

"A gondola will be at the steps in half an hour, signora."

"For me?"

"I have the honour of serving you, signora."

She understood.

But she chose to seize that hour of shadowed liberty. The gondola was waiting, the gondolier, a big, handsome fellow with evil eyes and a dissipated mouth. The decorous Müller, sitting apart, asked for her orders.

"St. Mark's."

The boat moved away.

In the Grand Canal a black gondola, that had been lying asleep like a water fowl, woke up and glided out from the shadow of a house. It followed the other at a distance, and the gondolier who handled it wore a red sash.

Gabrielle was crossing the Piazzetta of St. Mark's when she noticed a big man idling across the open space in front of her. He had his hands in his pockets, and his eyes looked up at the buildings with a casual dreaminess that was vividly familiar. His face was nut brown, and a little pointed beard jutted from his chin. A red sash completed the picture.

She glanced back with sudden caution. The imperturbable Müller was some ten paces behind her, politely detached, but ever on the alert. She passed close to the big gondolier, and as she passed he paused with his back

to her and, staring up at the Campanile of St. Mark, broke into the fragment of some song.

The words thrilled her:

"I am serving no double faults. These days I am a gondoliero."

She did not turn her head, but walked straight on, and after wandering rather aimlessly towards the Molo and the sea, she turned about and retraced her steps across the Piazzetta. Müller wheeled and followed, but at a slightly greater distance.

The big gondolier was still there, whistling and staring idly at nothing in particular. She passed very close, but looked straight ahead.

"St. Agnese."

"Double faults are dangerous."

"I am asking them to let me go on the lagoon to-morrow evening."

"I shall be there."

He idled round, star-gazing, and nearly elbowed into Müller, who had heard and noticed nothing. Gabrielle went back to her gondola with a strange joy in her heart and the exultation of a woman whose lover has proved his word.

Morisini discovered a happy gaiety in his wife when they met at the dinner table, a gaiety that seemed so natural and unstudied that it deceived him.

"Venice is as fascinating as ever."

"And the shops?"

"I did not go to the shops; I didn't need them."

Müller had made a negative report. She had spoken to nobody; her enjoyment of that hour's release could be regarded without suspicion.

And then she suggested the very adventure that the coward in him had accepted from Fritz Biedermann.

"I should like to go on the lagoon one night. When there is a moon."

"An inspiration. It is a long while since I tried to play the guitar. And why not to-morrow?"

"Yes, I am tired to-night. Let us say to-morrow."

He leered at his own subtlety, and sat up smoking, pitying her a little, but comforting himself with the philosophy of the German super-man. After all, she had tried to betray him, and he knew that he was despised. His callousness was comfortable and seri-

sual; it had dined well, yet about midnight it received a shock.

A bell rang. Müller appeared, wearing a black coat over pink pyjamas.

"A letter, signor."

"Who brought it?"

"I found it in the box."

The letter was from Fritz Biedermann, scribbled in a cipher that Morisini knew by heart, and all his philosophic callousness crumbled as he read it. He became the rat cornered, desperate, ready to snap with white teeth, a thing of viciousness and fear.

"I have had bad news," ran the message; "and you know who is responsible. We insist on silence. You have till midnight to-morrow. That little pleasure trip has been arranged."

Morisini burnt the letter. That was about all he could do.

Next day, about three in the afternoon, a certain Luigi Gonzaga was arrested in a low café by the Italian police. Gonzaga was a handsome man with evil eyes and a dissipated mouth. A French secret service agent had instigated the arrest, but no one knew that in Venice.

At seven the Morisini's dined in the blue salon of Herr Biedermann's house. Gabrielle was in royal blue, and a black domino hung over the back of her chair. She appeared very calm and cheerful, a woman who was ready to enjoy herself. Her husband was fidgety, talked with spasmodic vivacity and ate like a man who was nervous. Müller waited on them.

"The gondola will be here at half-past eight, signor."

"Excellent."

"Shall you need me?"

"No, we shall not need you, Müller."

After the coffee Gabrielle went up to her room. Her repressed and passionate excitement demanded a moment's breathing space, a chance to relax. A gondola passed, and she leant from the window and looked out, but twilight was falling and the water lay black and dim between the high houses. Overhead a few stars showed in a sky that was melting into the blue blackness of a summer night.

A second gondola slid into sight. The gondolier had a lamp beside him, and the gondola stopped at the steps. It

was too dark for her to recognise the man, but she heard her husband's voice.

Müller knocked at the door.

"The gondola is here, signora."

She knelt for a moment with her face buried in her hands, and then went slowly down the stairs. The suspense was like a hand at her throat, choking the exultation that fluttered there. And when she came to the arched doorway where Müller stood like a decorous mute, she saw the head and shoulders of the gondolier rising above the steps. He held his lantern for a moment so that the light shone on his face, and she saw the sharply-pointed beard and the blue eyes.

So great was her emotion that her knees trembled and her mouth quivered. Morisini was standing on the low wall beside the steps, and the sudden black eagerness of his glance frightened her. She raised the black domino to hide her face.

Her husband hurried after her with a treacherous and eager hand, and the smile of a Judas. The gondolier set down his lantern. His face was in the shadows.

"Where do we go, signora?"

"The lagoon by the Canale di S. Marco."

It was Morisini who answered.

The night was supremely still, and save where a passing gondola ruffled the surface, the water was a pavement of jet, with the great blue arch of the sky above. The lights from the houses threw flickers of gold on the canal. The stars were very soft and gentle, and the gondolier swung to his oar as though he were half asleep. Gabrielle and her husband had their backs to him, and he stood towering over them, the light from the lantern shining no higher than his red sash.

But once a foot moved cautiously forward and touched Gabrielle's elbow very gently. The touch went to her heart. She sat there, wondering, exultant.

Morisini chattered, and his black eyes watched the water restlessly. It was he who noticed that the gondola crept away from the broad highway and made for the passage between the Isola di S. Giorgio and La Giudecca. He exclaimed sharply.

"I said to the Canale di S. Marco."

"You said the lagoon, signor. We go to the lagoon."

The man was imperturbable to the point of sternness.

They swung under the shadows of the houses, glided through between the islands, and forged out into the open. The gondolier was swinging hard now against his oar. The moon was coming up, and there was a trickle of silver at the boat's bow. The lagoon looked like a great grey waste with its poles showing black and sharp. Somewhere from over the water came the panting of a motor-boat.

Then the gondolier did a clumsy thing. One of his feet slipped and pushed the lantern over into the water. He paused a moment, used an Italian oath, and bent again to his oar.

A slight mist seemed to lie upon the water, and that motor-boat had crept quite close to them before the gondolier deigned to notice it. The grey shape came sweeping up with its engine purring steadily. It was heading straight for the gondola.

"Guardate! Guardate!"

Morisini was sitting rigid, and the gondolier saw the white curve of his chin as he glanced back with furtive expectancy.

"Guardate!"

The bow of the motor-boat struck the poop of the gondola, a mere glancing blow, but it contrived the upsetting of the gondolier, who lost his oar and pitched forward on to Morisini. A hard brown fist caught the Italian's head, and the man above held the underman pinned and helpless. Someone in the motor-boat had grappled the gondola with a boat-hook.

"Is that you, Fielding?"

"All right, man; I have his pistol."

Fielding pitched Morisini forward, stood up, and held out a hand to Gabrielle.

"Quick! I'm sorry, but it couldn't be helped."

He half lifted her into the motor-boat, gave the gondola a thrust with his foot, and sat down beside her.

"Right! Full speed ahead, Thwaites. The quicker we are at sea the better."

He tossed a cushion on the grated floor of the motor-boat.

"I want you to sit down there. It's safer."

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She obeyed him, and he bent over her with one hand touching her shoulder.

"You are trusting me?"

"Always and ever."

"Thank God! They meant to kill you."

The boat was racing over the grey water, and for a while Fielding sat staring over the stern. Gabrielle's head was resting against his knee.

A black outline heaved out of the silver distance, grew big, remained so for a while, and then dwindled into obscurity. Water began to splash against the boat's bow; there was a new motion. It was the sea.

Fielding turned suddenly. The man at the tiller was staring straight ahead, another seemed busy at the engine.

"How did you find out?"

He bent over her upturned face.

"I had to find out. Something made me. I was in the great world's game, and that helped me."

Her eyes were full of light.

"But you can handle a gondola."

"That's an old trick of mine. Besides, in the great game one has to know how to do many things."

"Play tennis."

"Yes. Even tennis may be useful."

He found one of her hands, and she sat silent for a while.

"Where are we going?" she asked at last.

"To Sir Douglas Frensham's yacht."

"And afterwards?"

"Where you order me to take you."

"I wonder who sent you to me," she said, with a tremor of the lips.

"Perhaps it was St. Agnese," he said.

The usual passing interest was taken by the public in a paragraph that appeared in the Italian papers:

"MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT VENICE."

"The body of Signor Dominico Morisini has been found floating on the lagoon at Venice. Signor Morisini and his wife were making a moonlight excursion in a gondola, and an empty gondola has been discovered adrift near one of the sandbanks. The fate of Signora Morisini and the gondolier is unknown."

But Roger Fielding knew.

18
sweet old father and the ghosts of
hood,
rich man!"

"TY brought up the dinner quietly and
tightly. She was in a whirlwind of strange
wild thoughts, but the one that leapt
d sang loudest was the thought she
it to go—or not yet! She touched her
master's sleeve.

's ready, sir."

did not hear her.

's ready, Master Tom."

turned and saw her.

o you know where the old cook lives,
and the butler—Thomas? Aye, that
is name."

knew.

ARGOSY—
and round to them to-night, and say
an come back if they will. Or wait,
ink of it. You shall decide it."

"on't you sit down, sir?" she said.

ay for another," he answered briefly,

and she wondered for whom she was to lay.
Perhaps Doctor Watson, or the solicitor
was coming back.

"It's laid, sir," she said presently.

"Will you wait for—for—"

"I'll wait for nothing. I have waited,"
he said. Then he smiled upon her.

"You never gave me that kiss, after
all, Kitty!"

He put his arm about her and kissed her,
and tears ran down her face.

"I don't like you in that cap, Kitty.
Take it off!" said Tom Carew.

"Oh, sir!"

"Take it off," said the master.

So she took it off.

"That's better," said Tom Carew. "But
—I prefer you without that apron, Kitty."

"Oh, sir!"

"Take it off, my dear."

She looked at him appealingly.

"Take it off, Kitty—off with it."

And she obeyed him, wondering.

"Sit at the head of the table," said
Tom Carew.

The Call

WIND from the South is singing sweet and the hills are calling clear,
Their heather banks spell deep repose, each combe a melody,
Their paths are full of waking dreams and every hour is born
Peace for the heart, and for the eyes an age-old pageantry.

Over purple headlands the sea-gulls wheel and mew
High, high above the hollows where tawny peat-streams flow,
Nor hurry now the stately deer for baying hounds are still,
And vast grey scuds go drifting to the valley down below.

Wind from the South is singing sweet, brown earth all soft with rain,
And beautiful it is to walk where the pale sunshine thrills.
Unresting trails may beckon, but there's only one for me—
An old trail that is long and steep, the trail that leads to the hills.

R. FORTESCUE DORIA.



The Yellow House With The White Steps

A romance of modern Venice

By WARWICK DEEPING

GABRIELLE MORISINI stood
waiting at the doorway of her
husband's bedroom.

She had his keys in her hand, and she
held them as a woman holds something
that is precious. Her dark eyes looked at
the yellow wall of the house across the
street, but she did not see the wall nor the
sign of the Roman sky above it. She was
a woman who passed and remembered, a
woman whose memories were ironical
and deep. So much had happened in
those years. These quiet days in a Breton
cottage seemed like the green idyll
of some long forgotten spring. Then this
man, her husband, had come into her life
and plucked her away like a white rose
from the garden of her beauty. She had touched
the deep within him, learnt disillusionment,
and now he was lying in that inner room, a
man of dissipation and delirium, a thing
that was dead and panted and babbled
incoherent words.

The doctor came out, closing the door
after him. He was a debonair and imper-
ious little man with a quiet but decisive
manner.

"No, there is no change, signora."

She looked at him with her soft, frank
eyes.

"How long will it be?"

"I cannot say. My impression is that
he will recover."

She raised her hand and showed him
the keys.

"It is very awkward. I do not wish to
interfere with my husband's affairs, and
yet—"

He understood her.

"Be careful. But the responsibility is
yours. It is thrust upon you. Life has to
be paid for, and one has to pay one's
debts."

She didn't answer his smile, and he

passed on into the living room of the little
flat, picked up his hat and gloves and bowed
to her.

"I shall be here this evening."

"Thank you. You have been very kind."

Gabrielle Morisini stood and stared for
a while at the heavy cabinet made of chestnut
wood in which Dominico Morisini kept his
money and his papers. It was part of the
mystery of the man, part of the mystery of
his life, for her husband was still a mystery
to Gabrielle, an enigma that had long since
inspired a contemptuous mistrust. She
knew that he was a dissipated and irre-
sponsible cynic who did not work, but who
never lacked for money. She had always
wondered about that money and shrunk
from it, she knew not why.

Decision came to her with a flash of
impatience. She tried various keys before
she found the right one and the cabinet
stood open. Her curiosity boasted a
conscience, even though it had hesitated so
long. She had felt implicated in the man's
secrecy, tainted by it, and her pride
challenged her mistrust.

It was an illuminating hour for her, the
more so because it left her groping towards
further mysteries. She found money—
plenty of it—letters, letters that she glanced
at and put fastidiously aside. A little black
leather dispatch-box brought her puzzle-
ment and an intent frown, for in it she
found a queer, stumpy notebook bound in
red and black leather, and for a while she
could make nothing of its contents.
Suddenly she grasped them and understood.
The book was a code and cipher manual,
written in a neat Teutonic hand—the
dictionary by which a certain secret language
could be disentangled and translated.

When the little Italian doctor came that
evening she went with him into her
husband's room and stood beside the nurse

who was on duty. Morisini's thin and rather mean face looked flushed and wet. He lay propped up on pillows, panting, and his wide eyes saw nothing.

The doctor studied him a moment, one hand on the man's wrist. He nodded to the nurse, who brought her temperature chart.

Gabrielle watched them. She avoided glancing at her husband.

"The pulse is no worse."

"No; it has been better, doctor."

"And the breathing is not quite so hurried."

Afterwards, in the living-room, he glanced with critical sympathy at Morisini's wife.

"It is still doubtful. We are near the crisis, and the decision will be quick and final. Have you been out to-day?"

"Out of the house?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Dear lady, it is necessary. Go at once into the garden, you have an hour before sunset."

"I will go," she said.

Gabrielle craved for space, height, distance, an hour's aloofness from the ugly cynicism of a life that was becoming unbearable, and she found the atmosphere she craved for on the terrace of St. Pietro in Montorio. The west was all red, the city below her drenched in golden light, the distant hills like amethysts in a ring of tarnished silver. An opalescent haze hung over the Campagna, and Rome itself seemed strangely still.

She found more than a beautiful atmosphere on that lofty terrace. Someone came and stood near her by the wall, someone who looked at her tentatively and with a quick gleam of recognition.

"I did not know you were in Rome."

She turned sharply, conscious of a pleasant memory and finding it there in the flesh.

"You?"

She saw him as she had seen him so often on the courts of the Riviera, battling in some tough match, always imperturbable and good-tempered, head up, blue eyes steady.

"Well, and why not?"

A light came into her eyes, and the beautiful pallor of her face caught some of the colour of the sunset. For these two, the Englishman and a French wife of a cosmopolitan adventurer, had liked each other not a little. They had played tennis

and climbed the hills together that last winter; and the memory haunted them both.

"And why are you in Rome?"

Roger Fielding was looking at her with the inward intensity of a man whose eyes see more than a casual woman casually met.

"I have business here."

"I thought tennis and mountain climbing were your business."

"I have a thing that we call a brain even though I am English."

"Please don't use satire, it hurts."

And suddenly he was strangely touched. She had turned, and was looking over the city, and he was conscious of an indefinable sadness in her, a something near to tears.

She seemed lost in a momentary abstraction, her mouth plaintive, her pride drooping very wearily.

"I'm sorry. There are some people to whom one never wishes to be satirical. It seems a long time since that day we climbed to St. Agnese."

"You remember it?"

"I do not forget such days," he said.

Her face remained slightly averted.

"Yes; and to some of us they do not come very often. Do you remember when you were young thinking that life would be like that?"

She pointed to the city and all the glamour of the spring sunset.

"Some of it is still like that," he answered.

"What a boy you are! I have to go back now to the real life, the realities one does not see from the terrace of St. Pietro in Montorio. Shall you be in Rome long?"

"As long as I please, perhaps."

"How delightful to be able to come and go as you please!"

He was conscious of her as a woman with a tragedy, and the impression was so vivid and poignant that the man in him was deeply moved. That sallow, little oblique-eyed husband of hers with his rings and his eyeglasses and cynical red mouth had always smelt of the world's uncleanness. What a mockery!

She was smiling at Fielding and holding out her hand.

"Good-bye."

His eyes looked into hers.

"Is not that a slip of the tongue?"

Supposing you allow me to imagine that this is the mule-path down from St. Agnese?"

"Would it please you?"

"Yes."

Fielding walked with her as far as the house in the Via Lucida, and before he left her he knew that her husband was near death, yet he had the impression that it was his life and not his death that constituted the tragedy.

She was a true cynic and a true realist when she spoke of Morisini as a man with a sensitive pride could be brutal and cold.

"Good-bye. May I see you again?"

"Perhaps. There might be a second acquaintance."

"I should be very grateful for it. I hope you will not be so busy."

She had met a man with a sensitive pride could be brutal and cold.

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knew now why Fritz Biedermann husband's friend and whence Morisini's money. Yet these sordid secrets were details.

Beyond them loomed a great tracheries foreshadowing a vast ca a world assassination, and she saw with the eyes of a Frenchwoman, who had dreamed dreams in a convent. She sat there musing, blea distraught. Her conscience was pu its armour.

¶

GABRIELLE did not enter her hu room, but she waited for the sitting calmly in a chair by her f window, the window that gave her a of the cypresses in a neighbouring over. Your husband will recover."

The doctor's voice seemed to com a distance. She sat there staring out window, her face strangely hard and The message was oracular, or li pronouncing of a doom. She sa immediate destiny as clearly as on a white stone lying on a green hillside "I am glad to know. Does he unde things yet?"

"Yes; but it is essential that he not be worried."

"I understand that perfectly."

The doctor looked at her as a st of the emotions, admired her self-c and bowed himself out.

That evening she climbed the ste St. Pietro in Montorio and found Fielding waiting on the terrace. Her was a curious mingling of romance and finality. She had made a decision, an knew in her heart that nothing would it, but for the moment she hesitated hunter with rifle poised. She watche see the whole shape of the beast, make of it before she fired.

Fielding surprised her.

"He is better."

"How do you know?"

"I know, that is all."

She smiled rather wanly.

"How did you manage to play such tennis?" They called you the Rock. R are not subtle."

His eyes had a sudden shine in their "When one talks flippantly one is the edge of big things. Yet a man ha wait."

The Yellow House With The White Steps

"For what are you waiting?"

"I am waiting for you to trust me."

The audacities of some men are never impertinent, and a woman judges a man by her knowledge of his self-restraint.

"I am troubled about my husband," she said suddenly; and before Fielding left her that evening he knew a part of the truth.

Each day that followed had its incident for Gabrielle. She found herself standing at the foot of her husband's bed, very calm and cold and wondering, as she had often wondered, what madness on her mother's part had made her marry him.

"You are better? Dr. Fernandi says that you are out of danger."

"Yes, I am better."

He was very weak and fretful, but he did not play for her sympathy. He was a little afraid of her and ill at ease.

"Has anyone called?"

"No one."

"And there have been no letters?"

"None for you," she answered.

In three days Morisini was sitting up, and the lust to get well was a fever in him.

He asked for his keys, and was given them, though he seemed to shrink from any comment on their having been taken away. He was always asking for letters and glancing at his wife with oblique mistrust when she gave him some evasive answer.

Gabrielle was waiting, and one morning the post brought her the final message. She opened the little parcel in her room. It contained a popular book on motoring and a jocular note from Fritz Biedermann, but when she cut away the paper from one of the boards of the cover she found the thing for which she had waited.

The red and black book gave her the cipher, and her face grew more serious and set as she disentangled the message. This was no mere sinister sketching of events that were to happen within the next three months. Written here were cold, clear, and definite orders—"You will do this" and "You will do that," and she knew that these orders meant assassination and war.

When Gabrielle had deciphered the whole of it she made a little parcel of the two books and Biedermann's torn photo and hid it away among her winter clothes. Then she sat down again and wrote a note to Fielding at his hotel:

"You asked me to trust you. Will you come to me here at ten o'clock to-morrow? I know that you will not fail."

She was a woman armed, and Dominico Morisini was to see the white blaze of her armour. He had tried to dress himself on that fatal morning when she entered his room, and she found him sitting on the side of his bed and carefully waxing his little black moustache.

She was very quiet and mercilessly calm, and her calmness alarmed him. He tried to parry it with a jocular gaiety.

"All dressed up and ready to go out?"

"Yes."

"And who is the happy man in whose honour?"

"I am going to the French Legation."

She saw him hold his breath and stiffen. His face seemed to grow thinner and more mean.

"To lunch, eh?"

"No, to prevent men being killed and a country devastated."

He sprang up, shaking and screaming like an hysterical girl.

"What do you mean? I forbid you to go. It is all nonsense."

She looked at him with such scorn and such steadfastness that he knew that the end had come.

"There have been letters. Where are those letters?"

"I shall not tell you."

He lurched towards her, tottered, fell sideways on the bed and lay there panting.

"It's a lie—a damned lie! I'll explain—I'll explain everything."

She closed the door on him, glanced at her wrist watch and walked out of the flat.

Fielding met her on the stairs, and she looked to him like the figure of France—pale, dark-eyed, implacable.

"You will come with me?"

"Anywhere."

"It is to the French Legation."

A new alertness showed on his brown face.

"That's queer, very queer. I'm playing in this big game; it's bigger than tennis."

"You?"

"That's not the reason why I am here, Gabrielle. I'm not that sort of beast. But, good God!"

She opened her vanity bag as they went slowly down the stairs and took out the little parcel that held the books and papers.

"You asked me to trust you. Take this. It is proof of everything; it may be better that I should not carry it. But oh, my friend, that a woman should have to

play the spy because her conscience drives her!"

He took the parcel, raised her gloved hand and kissed it.

"I can guess where the honour lies, and your honest rests with me."

Those two had hardly turned out of the Via Lucida when a big grey closed car pulled up outside the flats and an unwieldy man in a blue suit climbed out of it. He was heavier on his feet than his bulk suggested, and he went up the steps with the agility of a young man.

"The devil! He you are here!"

"Biedermann! Come in, quick."

The big German had blundered into a waiting, grey-faced man at the top of the stairs, a man who clutched at him and gasped.

"Biedermann! What's the matter, Nico?"

"The devil! He you are here! He got hold of my keys. Did you send my letters?"

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

"Biedermann! He you are here! I had no time to tell you. I am here."

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

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"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

"Biedermann! I'll send them through the porter's hand."

By Warwick I

weary, very ready to let the bus slip into his hands.

"But why should you?"

"I could give you the greatest the world, but that must wait."

She flushed and her eyes softened. "Well, I surrender."

"Sit down there and wait. I save you from being dragged if possible."

Fielding was climbing the stairs when the grey car stopped at the gate. A priest emerged from the car, a priest with a glossy, rosy-faced old cleric with the blue eyes and a good smile.

He spoke to the porter:

"Has a lady called here, a you rather tall and dark?"

The porter was laconic and precise. "I think she is waiting in the signor."

"Thank you; I have called for husband, who is an invalid, is in the car."

This piece of benignity toddled into the vestibule and presented himself to Gabrielle.

"Signora Morisini?"

She stared at him.

"Yes."

"Signora, will you speak to you for a moment before he leaves. Yes, yes; this lamentable business had sent for me and I find him here. Signora, you can trust me."

"Where is my husband?"

"I have him in a car at the gate. He goes to the station. Be a moment of mercy will not be."

She gave a little shrug of the shoulders and went with him. Meantime the porter, who was an inquisitive soul, the bristling head and red face of the porter, who was an inquisitive soul, at the near window of the car. The lady passed him, and he stared at them as they passed.

The door of the car opened, the porter concluded that the lady was to enter it. The conclusion was but the method astonished him, for Hoffman's hands became the hands of an ordinary un-Christian man and some force within the car that more forcible than the priest.

"Sapristi! Stop, you pigs!"

But the car moved on and carried momentary glimpses of a struggling woman overpowered

The Yellow House With The White Steps

and thrust down by rough hands out of sight.

Ten seconds later he was facing Roger Fielding, a very angry man with blue eyes that stared.

"What? Taken away by force?"

"Yes, signor."

"And what were you doing?"

"I was surprised, signor. There was a priest and a big man in the car with the face of a German."

"The car had a number?"

"I forgot to notice it, signor—it was a big grey car."

"Oh, to the devil with you!"

IN a little waterway off the Grand Canal at Venice stood a house with white steps going down to the green water, a house whose walls were the colour of yellow sand. It had queer round-headed windows fitted with white and yellow sun-blinds, and a great gondola post painted red stood at the bottom of the white steps.

In the salon of the house two men sat talking. They had drawn their chairs to the window, and the stars showed in the deep blue-black sky.

"So she swears that she has burnt them?"

"Swears to it."

"Yet I would not trust any woman, Nico. Your life is not worth it, my friend, for we hold yours in pawn."

Morisini squirmed in his chair.

"And people think you such a roaring good fellow."

Biedermann beamed.

"And so I am, Nico; but sometimes it is necessary to be brutal. Look at the matter honestly. She showed no disinclination to betray you, eh? It will have to be done, my friend; it will have to be done."

"The Italian bit at his moustache."

"What a devil you are. I could swear she is sorry."

"You fool; she hates you. We are taking no more chances; the business is too big to be spoilt by a woman's tongue. And, mind you—"

He leant over and beat with his fist on the arm of Morisini's chair as he talked to him, like a smith hammering on an anvil. Morisini shrank and crumpled. His chin seemed to lose itself in his collar; he was sick and afraid.

"But how? Do you expect me—"

"A little diplomacy, my friend, a little softness. We will spoil her a little, keep up appearances, and then one evening you will take her on the lagoon and there will be an accident."

"How?"

"I will arrange it; I know the men. But no puppy tricks, dear friend, or you will go down, too, with a stone round your neck. We should see to it. I should be sorry, for you are useful."

At the window of an upper room Morisini's wife sat, looking at the same stars.

She was a woman in whom a great fear struggled with her pride, for she was a prisoner in this Venetian house, and the house was Fritz Biedermann's. She had been crushed, drugged, smuggled into the place, stormed at, bullied, tormented by the emotional outbursts of her husband. She knew her danger, and had tried to see it with calmness and even with stoicism, telling herself that Roger Fielding had the greater issue in his hands, and that her own life was a mere white feather on the waters.

But she wanted to live. Life cried out in her with a new yearning, and this house in Venice smelt of death. She could hear the murmur of the two men's voices, and instinct told that their words concerned her. She had got herself tangled up in all their secret machinery, and she knew how brutal Biedermann's hands could be.

"The signora will take coffee in bed?"

"Yes."

This was her sixth day in the house, and Gabrielle prepared to spend it as she had spent the others, sitting at her window, listening, thinking, pretending to read. Gondolas passed below, but her window was high up and away from life of the water-city. She would sit and listen to the faint lapping of the water against the walls after a gondola had passed, and sometimes she would bend forward and look out.

This day was to be different. She was at the window, looking out, when a long black gondola swung into view, breaking all the many-coloured reflections in the

water and disturbing the shadows so that they broke and moved like live things. The boat came along lazily, the gondolier, a tall man with a red sash round his waist, swinging his body very gently against the oar. He was whistling some carnival song.

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She understood.

But she chose to seize that I

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"St. Mark's."

The boat moved away.

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Gabrielle was crossing the Piazz

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The words thrilled her:

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She did not turn her head, but v

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"I shall be there."

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By Warwick D

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The Yellow House With The White Steps

her gondola with a strange joy in her heart and the exultation of a woman whose lover has proved his word.

¶

MORISINI discovered a happy gaiety in his wife when they met at the dinner table, a gaiety that seemed so natural and unstudied that it deceived him.

"Venice is as fascinating as ever."

"And the shops?"

"I did not go to the shops; I didn't need them."

Müller had made a negative report. She had spoken to nobody; her enjoyment of that hour's release could be regarded without suspicion.

And then she suggested the very adventure that the coward in him had accepted from Fritz Biedermann.

"I should like to go on the lagoon one night. When there is a moon."

"An inspiration. It is a long while since I tried to play the guitar. And why not to-morrow?"

"Yes, I am tired to-night. Let us say to-morrow."

He leered at his own subtlety, and sat up smoking, pitying her a little, but comforting himself with the philosophy of the German super-man. After all, she had tried to betray him, and he knew that he was despised. His callousness was comfortable and sensual; it had dined well, yet about midnight it received a shock.

A bell rang. Müller appeared, wearing a black coat over pink pyjamas.

"A letter, signor."

"Who brought it?"

"I found it in the box."

The letter was from Fritz Biedermann, scribbled in a cipher that Morisini knew by heart, and all his philosophic callousness crumbled as he read it. He became the rat cornered, desperate, ready to snap with white teeth, a thing of viciousness and fear.

"I have had bad news," ran the message; "and you know who is responsible. We insist on silence. You have till midnight to-morrow. That little pleasure trip has been arranged."

Morisini burnt the letter. That was about all he could do.

Next day, about three in the afternoon, a certain Luigi Gonzaga was arrested in a low café by the Italian police. Gonzaga was a handsome man with evil eyes and a

dissipated month. A French secret service agent had instigated the arrest, but no one knew that in Venice.

At seven the Morisini dined in the blue salon of Herr Biedermann's house. Gabrielle was in royal blue, and a black domino hung over the back of her chair. She appeared very calm and cheerful, a woman who was ready to enjoy herself. Her husband was fidgety, talked with spasmodic vivacity and ate like a man who was nervous. Müller waited on them.

"The gondola will be here at half-past eight, signor."

"Excellent."

"Shall you need me?"

"No, we shall not need you, Müller."

After the coffee Gabrielle went up to her room. Her repressed and passionate excitement demanded a moment's breathing space, a chance to relax. A gondola passed, and she leant from the window and looked out, but twilight was falling, and the water lay black and dim between the high houses. Overhead a few stars showed in a sky that was melting into the blue blackness of a summer night.

A second gondola slid into sight. The gondolier had a lamp beside him, and the gondola stopped at the steps. It was too dark for her to recognize the man, but she heard her husband's voice.

Müller knocked at the door.

"The gondola is here, signora."

She knelt for a moment with her face buried in her hands, and then went slowly down the stairs. The suspense was like a hand at her throat, choking the exultation that fluttered there. And when she came to the arched doorway where Müller stood like a decorous mute, she saw the head and shoulders of the gondolier rising above the steps. He held his lantern for a moment so that the light shone on his face, and she saw the sharply-pointed beard and the blue eyes.

So great was her emotion that her knees trembled and her mouth quivered. Morisini was standing on the low wall beside the steps, and the sudden black eagerness of his glance frightened her. She raised the black domino to hide her face.

Her husband hurried after her with a treacherous and eager hand, and the smile of a Judas. The gondolier set down his lantern. His face was in the shadows.

"Where do we go, signora?"

"The lagoon by the Canale di S. Marco."

He was Morisini who answered.

The night was supremely still, and save for a quivering gondola ruffled the surface, the water was a pavement of jet, with the stars like stars of the sky above. The lights from the houses threw flickers of gold on the water. The steps were very soft and gentle, and the gondolier swung to his oar so smoothly he was half asleep. Gabrielle put her husband and their backs to him, and he drew something over them, the light from the houses shining no higher than his head.

The boat moved steadily forward. The water was so calm and very gently. The boat was so light. She sat there, her hands clasped.

The boat moved and his black eyes looked at her steadily. It was his first time since the gondola swept away from the Canal di S. Marco and came for the first time to the Canale di S. Marco.

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By Warwick Deane

gondolier, who lost his oar and pin forward on to Morisini. A hard brow caught the Italian's head, and the above held the under man pinned helpless. Someone in the motor-boat grappled the gondola with a boat-hook.

"Is that you, Fielding?"

"All right, man; I have his pistol."

Fielding pitched Morisini forward, up, and held out a hand to Gabrielle.

"Quick! I'm sorry, but it couldn't help."

He half lifted her into the motor-gave the gondola a thrust with his and sat down beside her.

"Right! Full speed ahead, Thw! The quicker we are at sea the better."

He tossed a cushion on the grated of the motor-boat.

"I want you to sit down there. safer."

She obeyed him, and he bent over with one hand touching her shoulder.

"You are trusting me?"

"Always and ever."

"Thank God! They meant to kill y"

The boat was racing over the grey water for a while Fielding sat staring over stern. Gabrielle's head was resting against his knee.

¶

A BLACK outline heaved out of the distance, grew big, remained so for a while, and then dwindled into obscurity. Water began to splash against the bow; there was a new motion. It was the sea.

Fielding turned suddenly. The man at the tiller was staring straight ahead, and seemed busy at the engine.

"How did you find out?"

He bent over her upturned face.

"I had to find out. Something told me. I was in the great world's game, that helped me."

Her eyes were full of light.

"But you can handle a gondola."

"That's an old trick of mine. Besides in the great game one has to know how to do many things."

"Play tennis."

"Yes. Even tennis may be useful."

He found one of her hands, and she was silent for a while.

"Where are we going?" she asked last.

"To Sir Douglas Frensham's yacht."

The Yellow House With The White Steps

"And afterwards?"

"Where you order me to take you."

"I wonder who sent you to me," she said, with a tremor of the lips.

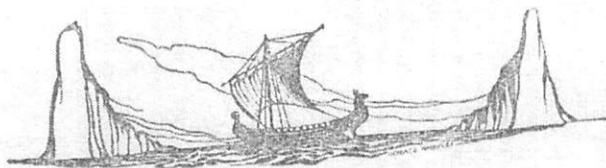
"Perhaps it was St. Agnese," he said.

The usual passing interest was taken by the public in a paragraph that appeared in the Italian papers:

MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT VENICE

The body of Signor Dominico Morisini has been found floating on the lagoon at Venice. Signor Morisini and his wife were making a moonlight excursion in a gondola, and an empty gondola has been discovered adrift near one of the sandbanks. The fate of Signora Morisini and the gondolier is unknown.

But Roger Fielding knew.



The Poets on Poetry

POETRY is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. SHELLEY.

Good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is everywhere and in each, and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole. COLERIDGE.

SCIENCE sees signs, poetry the thing signified. J. C. HARE.

IN poetry there is always fallacy, and sometimes fiction. SIR WALTER SCOTT.

POETRY is of all humane learning the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence all other learnings have taken their beginnings. SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

EVERY poem must be made up of lines that are poems. EMERSON.

POETRY should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity. KEATS.

NEITHER gods, nor men, nor the book-shops allow the poets the favour of being mediocre. HORACE.

POETRY is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. WORDSWORTH.

It is the great poets who have decided the genius of languages. VOLTAIRE.

It is a great merit, I might almost call it a divine gift, when any poet is seen to retain throughout life traces of his youthful impressions and feelings. KEBLE.

WITH poetry, as with going to sea, we should push from the shore and reach a certain elevation before we unfurl all our sails. GOETHE.

THE poet bestrides the clouds, the wise man looks up at them. ARLISS.

THE poet's heart is an unlighted torch, which gives no help to his footsteps till love has touched it with flame. LOWELL.

By Warwick Deeping

play the spy because her conscience drives her!"

He took the parcel, raised her gloved hand and kissed it.

"I can guess where the honour lies, and your honour rests with me."

These two had hardly turned out of the Via Lucida when a big grey closed car pulled up outside the flats and an unwieldy man in a blue suit climbed out of it. He was brisker on his feet than his bulk suggested, and he went up the steps with the speed of a young man.

"The devil! So you are here!"

"Biedermann! Come in quick."

The big German had blundered into a tottering, grey-faced man at the top of the stairs, a man who clutched at him and gabbled.

"Thunder! What's the matter, Nico?"

"I've been ill, nearly dead. She got hold of my keys. Did you send any letters?"

Biedermann glared, swept him through the doorway and closed the door.

"Letters? Of course, and I had no acknowledgment. That's why I am here. But what the devil do you mean?"

"She must have stopped those letters, got hold of the cipher and read them."

"What? And who is 'she'?"

"Gabrielle."

"You sot! Where is your wife?"

"Gone to the French Legation. It can't have been ten minutes since she left here. She knows everything, Fritz, if there was anything serious in those letters."

"Serious? Thunder! There was everything in them! Those letters must never get to the Legation."

He was savage, a tempest of a man like some old Berserker. He put one arm round Morisini, threw the door open, and carried him down the stairs as a child might carry a doll.

"My car is here. A drive will do you good, my friend. And we shall have Father Hoffman with us."

"Hoffman!"

"She does not know Hoffman, does she? The devil take all women!"

At the French Legation Fielding and Morisini's wife were standing in the vestibule looking into each other's eyes and talking softly together.

"I know these people. Why not let me do all this beastly business for you?"

His strength and the tenderness behind it were dominating her. She felt very

weary, very ready to let the burden of it slip into his hands.

"But why should you?"

"I could give you the greatest reason in the world, but that must wait."

She flushed and her eyes softened.

"Well, I surrender."

"Sit down there and wait. I want to save you from being dragged into it if possible."

Fielding was climbing the stairs when the grey car stopped at the gate of the Legation. A priest emerged from it, a glossy, rosy-faced old cleric with the mildest of blue eyes and a good smile.

He spoke to the porter:

"Has a lady called here, a young lady—rather tall and dark?"

The porter was laconic and polite.

"I think she is waiting in the vestibule, signor."

"Thank you; I have called for her. Her husband, who is an invalid, is waiting in the car."

This piece of benignity toddled into the vestibule and presented himself with a bow to Gabrielle.

"Signora Morisini?"

She stared at him.

"Yes."

"Signora, will you speak to your husband for a moment before he leaves Rome? Yes, yes; this lamentable business! He had sent for me and I find him a broken man. Signora, you can trust me."

"Where is my husband?"

"I have him in a car at the gate. Afterwards he goes to the station. Believe me, one moment of mercy will not be wasted."

She gave a little shrug of the shoulders, rose and went with him. Meanwhile, the porter, who was an inquisitive soul, noticed the bristling head and red face of a big man at the near window of the car. The priest and the lady passed him, and he turned to stare at them as they passed.

The door of the car opened, and the porter concluded that the lady was going to enter it. The conclusion was justified, but the method astonished him, for Father Hoffman's hands became the hands of an ordinary un-Christian man and there was some force within the car that was even more forcible than the priest.

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The Yellow House With The White Steps

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"The car had a number?"

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"Oh, to the devil with you!"



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"So she swears that she has burnt them?"

"Swears to it."

"Yet I would not trust any woman, Nico. Your life is not worth it, my friend, for we hold yours in pawn."

Morisini squirmed in his chair.

"And people think you such a roaring good fellow."

Biedermann beamed.

"And so I am, Nico; but sometimes it is necessary to be brutal. Look at the matter honestly. She showed no disinclination to betray you, eh? It will have to be done, my friend; it will have to be done."

The Italian bit at his moustache.

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"A little diplomacy, my friend, a little softness. We will spoil her a little, keep up appearances, and then one evening you will take her on the lagoon and there will be an accident."

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But she wanted to live. Life cried out in her with a new yearning, and this house in Venice smelt of death. She could hear the murmur of the two men's voices, and instinct told that their words concerned her. She had got herself tangled up in all their secret machinery, and she knew how brutal Biedermann's hands could be.

"The signora will take coffee in bed?"

It was the German maid standing at her bedside next morning.

"Yes."

This was her sixth day in the house, and Gabrielle prepared to spend it as she had spent the others, sitting at her window, listening, thinking, pretending to read. Gondolas passed below, but her window was high up and away from life of the water-city. She would sit and listen to the faint lapping of the water against the walls after a gondola had passed, and sometimes she would bend forward and look out.

This day was to be different. She was at the window, looking out, when a long black gondola swung into view, breaking all the many-coloured reflections in the water and disturbing the shadows so that they broke and moved like live things. The boat came along lazily, the gondolier, a tall man with a red sash round his waist, swinging his body very gently against the oar. He was whistling some carnival song,

10

By Warwick Deeping

and staring up dreamily at the sky and the houses as though life had no hurry for him on such a June day.

His eyes met Gabrielle's, and thrilled her even at that distance. There was something familiar about the figure, an indescribable something.

He passed with his gondola, and in half an hour he returned, looking up in the same casual and dreamy way. There was just the momentary stare of the eyes under the slouch hat, no change in the gentle, rhythmic swinging of his body, nothing to mar the casualness of it all.

A little later her husband was standing in her room, suave, dandified, vaguely apologetic.

"Fritz is going. We are all rather desolated by what has happened, and Fritz is a good soul when people do not tread on his feet."

"And he is going—where?"

"To Vienna. He is leaving us his house and servants for a fortnight. We have prepared a little lunch of reconciliation. I go with Fritz to the station, and perhaps in the cool you would care to wander and look at the shops? Do not quarrel with a small peace offering."

She remained stiff and silent for a moment. He had slipped a bundle of notes under the writing-pad on her table.

"I have been a bad girl, is that it, and Fritz wants to forgive me?"

Her voice was very level and unstrained.

"Of course. Who wants to quarrel with a very charming woman?"

She mistrusted them utterly, but her fear and her new joy in life cried out in her and urged dissimulation.

In the blue salon Fritz Biedermann bowed over her hand.

"I am a barbarian, signora, and I have the faults of a barbarian; a wild beast when I am angry, but a beast that bears no malice."

He was all smiles and conciliation, the good fellow ready to be generous. Gabrielle made herself smile.

"It will take many months, Herr Fritz, to wipe away that memory."

"Then let it be months," he said with ponderous gallantry. "I shall not grumble."

They lunched and even made a show of being merry, and the afternoon brought other happenings. Biedermann and Morisini went off to the station, and about five o'clock, Müller, the confidential Müller, presented himself.

"A gondola will be at the steps in half an hour, signora."

"For me?"

"I have the honour of serving you, signora."

She understood.

But she chose to seize that hour of shadowed liberty. The gondola was waiting, the gondolier, a big, handsome fellow with evil eyes and a dissipated mouth. The decorous Müller, sitting apart, asked for her orders.

"St. Mark's."

The boat moved away.

In the Grand Canal, a black gondola, that had been lying asleep like a water fowl, woke up and glided out from the shadow of a house. It followed the other at a distance, and the gondolier who handled it wore a red sash.

Gabrielle was crossing the Piazzetta of St. Mark's when she noticed a big man idling across the open space in front of her. He had his hands in his pockets, and his eyes looked up at the buildings with a casual dreaminess that was vividly familiar. His face was nut brown, and a little pointed beard jutted from his chin. A red sash completed the picture.

She glanced back with sudden caution. The imperturbable Müller was some ten paces behind her, politely detached, but ever on the alert. She passed close to the big gondolier, and as she passed he paused with his back to her and, staring up at the Campanile of St. Mark, broke into the fragment of some song.

The words thrilled her:

"I am serving no double faults. These days I am a gondoliero."

She did not turn her head, but walked straight on, and after wandering rather aimlessly towards the Molo and the sea, she turned about and retraced her steps across the Piazzetta. Müller wheeled and followed, but at a slightly greater distance.

The big gondolier was still there, whistling and staring idly at nothing in particular. She passed very close, but looked straight ahead.

"St. Agnese."

"Double faults are dangerous."

"I am asking them to let me go on the lagoon to-morrow evening."

"I shall be there."

He idled round, star-gazing, and nearly elbowed into Müller, who had heard and noticed nothing. Gabrielle went back to

her gondola with a strange joy in her heart and the exultation of a woman whose lover has proved his word.

¶

MORISINI discovered a happy gaiety in his wife when they met at the dinner table, a gaiety that seemed so natural and unstudied that it deceived him.

"And the shops?"

"I did not go to the shops; I didn't need them."

Müller had made a negative report. She had spoken to nobody; her enjoyment of that hour's release could be regarded without suspicion.

And then she suggested the very adventure that the coward in him had accepted from Fritz Biedermann.

"I should like to go on the lagoon one night. When there is a moon."

"An inspiration. It is a long while since I tried to play the guitar. And why not to-morrow?"

"Yes, I am tired to-night. Let us say to-morrow."

He leered at his own subtlety, and sat up smoking, pitying her a little, but comforting himself with the philosophy of the German super-man. After all, she had tried to betray him, and he knew that he was despised. His callousness was comfortable and sensual; it had dined well, yet about midnight it received a shock.

A bell rang. Müller appeared, wearing a black coat over pink pyjamas.

"A letter, signor."

"Who brought it?"

"I found it in the box."

The letter was from Fritz Biedermann, scribbled in a cipher that Morisini knew by heart, and all his philosophic callousness crumbled as he read it. He became the rat cornered, desperate, ready to snap with white teeth, a thing of viciousness and fear.

"I have had bad news," ran the message; "and you know who is responsible. We insist on silence. You have till midnight to-morrow. That little pleasure trip has been arranged."

Morisini burnt the letter. That was about all he could do.

Next day, about three in the afternoon, a certain Luigi Gonzaga was arrested in a low café by the Italian police. Gonzaga was a handsome man with evil eyes and a

"The lagoon by the Canale di S. Marco."

"Where do we go, signora?"

His face was in the shadows.

Her husband hurried after her with a treacherous and eager hand, and the smile of a Judas. The gondolier set down his lantern. The gondolier set down his

domino to hide her face.

glance frightened her. She raised the black steps, and the sudden black eagerness of his

trembled and her mouth quivered. Morisini

So great was her emotion that her knees

blue eyes.

she saw the sharply-pointed beard and the

steps. He held his lantern on his face, and

so that the light shone on his face, and

shoulders of the gondolier rising above the

like a decorous mute, she saw the head and

to the arched doorway where Müller stood

that hurried there. And when she came

a hand at her throat, choking the exultation

down the stairs. The suspense was like

buried in her hands, and then went slowly

She knelt for a moment with her face

"The gondola is here, signora."

Müller knocked at the door.

heard her husband's voice.

dark for her to recognize the man, but she

gondola stopped at the steps. It was too

A second gondola slid into sight. The

summer night.

was melting into the blue blackness of

Overhead a few stars showed in a sky that

lay black and dim between the high horses.

out, but twilight was falling, and the water

and she leant from the window and looked

space, a chance to relax. A gondola passed,

excitement demanded a moment's breathing

her room. Her repressed and passionate

After the coffee Gabrielle went up to

"No, we shall not need you, Müller."

"Excellent."

eight, signor."

"The gondola will be here at half-past

waited on them.

ate like a man who was nervous. Müller

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over the back of her chair. She appeared

was in royal blue, and a black domino hung

salon of Herr Biedermann's house. Gabrielle

At seven the Morisins dined in the blue

knew that in Venice.

agent had instigated the arrest, but no one

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By Warwick Deeping

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It was Morisini who answered.

The night was supremely still, and save where a passing gondola ruffled the surface, the water was a pavement of jet, with the great blue arch of the sky above. The lights from the houses threw flickers of gold on the canal. The stars were very soft and gentle, and the gondolier swung to his oar as though he were half asleep. Gabrielle and her husband had their backs to him, and he stood towering over them, the light from the lantern shining no higher than his red sash.

But once a foot moved cautiously forward and touched Gabrielle's elbow very gently. The touch went to her heart. She sat there, wondering, exultant.

Morisini chattered, and his black eyes watched the water restlessly. It was he

who noticed that the gondola crept away from the broad highway and made for the passage between the Isola di S. Giorgio and La Giudecca.

He exclaimed sharply.

"I said to the Canale di S. Marco."

"You said the lagoon, signor. We go to the lagoon."

The man was imperturbable to the point of darkness.

They swung under the shadows of the houses, glided through between the islands, and slipped out into the open. The gondolier was swinging hard now against his oar. The moon was coming up, and there was a tangle of silver at the boat's bow. The water looked like a great grey waste with no point showing black and sharp. Somewhere from over the water came the panting of a motor-boat.

Then the gondolier did a queer thing. One of his feet slipped and pushed the boat into the water. He paused a moment, and an Italian oath, and bent forward.

A light was shown to be upon the water, and that motor-boat had crept quite close to them before the gondolier deigned to notice it. The grey shape came sweeping on with its engine purring steadily. It was heading straight for the gondola.

"Guardate! Guardate!"

Morisini was sitting rigid, and the gondolier saw the white curve of his chin as he glanced back with furtive expectancy.

The bow of the motor-boat struck the side of the gondola, a mere glancing blow, but it caused the upsetting of the

gondolier, who lost his oar and pitched forward on to Morisini. A hard brown fist caught the Italian's head, and the man above held the under man pinned and helpless. Someone in the motor-boat had grappled the gondola with a boat-hook.

"Is that you, Fielding?"

"All right, man; I have his pistol."

Fielding pitched Morisini forward, stood up, and held out a hand to Gabrielle.

"Quick! I'm sorry, but it couldn't be helped."

He half lifted her into the motor-boat, gave the gondola a thrust with his foot, and sat down beside her.

"Right! Full speed ahead, Thwaites. The quicker we are at sea the better."

He tossed a cushion on the grated floor of the motor-boat.

"I want you to sit down there. It's safer."

She obeyed him, and he bent over her with one hand touching her shoulder.

"You are trusting me?"

"Always and ever."

"Thank God! They meant to kill you."

The boat was racing over the grey water, and for a while Fielding sat staring over the stern. Gabrielle's head was resting against his knee.

A BLACK outline heaved out of the silver distance, grew big, remained so for a while, and then dwindled into obscurity. Water began to splash against the boat's bow; there was a new motion. It was the sea.

Fielding turned suddenly. The man at the tiller was staring straight ahead, another seemed busy at the engine.

"How did you find out?"

He bent over her upturned face.

"I had to find out. Something made me. I was in the great world's game, and that helped me."

Her eyes were full of light.

"But you can handle a gondola."

"That's an old trick of mine. Besides, in the great game one has to know how to do many things."

"Play tennis."

"Yes. Even tennis may be useful."

He found one of her hands, and she sat silent for a while.

"Where are we going?" she asked at last.

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Valour

19

A difficult thing to define is valour. In this brilliant story the author brings a world of sympathy and understanding to bear upon a subject which is far more abstruse than many people seem to realise

By

Warwick Deeping



COUPLE of admiring women watched Pierce Hammersley walk down the platform of Scarshott Station.

"Don't he make a fine-looking officer? He used to be a bit skinny like, but he's filled out wonderful."

"And don't he fancy himself!"

"And why shouldn't he? I like a man to walk with a bit of a swagger."

Lieutenant Hammersley saluted an old lady who turned smiling maternal eyes

on him, and stopped to tell the porter about his luggage.

"One kit-bag and a valise. The car should be outside."

The old lady sidled up, blushing and extending a small hand.

"I hear this is your last leave—Mr. Pierce." She had nearly said "dear," but checked herself.

"Yes, that's true."

"And where are you going?"

"The Dardanelles."

Her eyes grew serious, and then brightened.

"Oh, dear! What a long way! But we are all very proud of you."

He smiled down at her, saluted again, and passed on.

His drive through Scarshott had in it the elements of a triumph. Everybody who counted seemed to have some sort of business in the High Street, and just by the Georgian town hall, with its big bracket-clock and lead cupola, a wagon had got into difficulties and was holding up the traffic. The June sunlight struck on the warm red brick of the houses, and the tall elms in the gardens were edged with gold. Hammersley's right hand kept rising to the peak of his cap. Kate Varley went by, smiling at him out of her dark eyes. Little Grace Rentoul hung, blushing, for a moment or two over the door of the motor-car.

"Is it true you're going out?"

"Quite true."

Her ingenuous face paled visibly.

"I'm—I'm sorry."

Then the traffic cleared, and the car went on.

Other women looked at Hammersley, women who could not claim a salute. There was a moment of tension in the feminine atmosphere of the old town, a subtle sexual excitement stirred by this man in khaki. The war had quickened life, touched the elemental emotions with a delicate and responsive passion. The male and the female beheld in each other the finer, vital contrasts.

Pierce Hammersley had always been a man to be looked at, and not merely because the Hammersleys had led the life of Scarshott for half a century. He was a tall, clear-faced fellow, with rather restless eyes. He carried his head with a certain pride; he had got good blood in him, and not a little cleverness. Young girls were somewhat shy of him. He threw out a suggestion of scorn when people chattered provincially; he never argued; his individualism had a fierce independence.

The car turned in between the great stone gate-pillars of Orchards, and the full-fronted house blinked its white windows through the trees. Porteous Hammersley, Esq., was loitering at the end of the drive, making a pretence of examining the standard roses for any trace of green fly.

"Hallo, my boy, here you are!"

He held out a plump pink hand, and squinted affectionately over the tops of gold-rimmed pince-nez perched half way down his nose. People had said that Porteous Hammersley resembled a plump, healthy and well-preened bird—a very aristocratic, debonair bird that could talk wisely and say nothing.

"The train was late, dad."

"Habit, Pierce—habit. Your mother is in the drawing-room. Of course, she—feeling things; only to be expected. But then duty—pride; she bears up on those."

Sophia Hammersley was bearing up magnificently. She had never indulged in emotion—did not understand it—and her manner suggested that such a quality belonged only to little dressmakers who did not know how to behave. She was big and white, and spoke slowly and with great emphasis.

"My dear Pierce, this is a very great occasion."

"Is it, mother?"

"My dear boy, we are making our sacrifice through you."

"Meanwhile the firm is going to make a fortune out of leather."

For the Hammersleys were tanners, but very distinguished and dignified tanners.

"I have always wished, Pierce, you would not be so flippant."

"I was only stating a truth, mater. Facts seem flippant when we fall over them."

He kissed his mother, and suddenly became restless.

"I'll go and clean up. Our trains seem dirtier than ever."

Nor did his restlessness diminish. It dominated him so palpably after dinner that he left his father with a half-finished cigar, and made a brusque escape through the meadow gate and so to the high road under the elms.

Scarshott ended in common land and pine country, where the sands sloped down to overlap the clays, and Pierce Hammersley's objective lay among the pine woods. It was a little, new, rough-cast cottage, with brown tiles, a ragged yew hedge and a white gate.

A girl was planting out seedlings in the garden. She appeared to have been expecting Hammersley, for she stood behind the yew hedge and watched him cross the common.

She was a tall girl, with a mass of rich brown hair waved back to meet the lines of a graceful neck. At the first glance a man might have thought nothing of her face. It was broad and sun-tanned; the mouth was too big, the cheek bones slightly too prominent. She had large blue-green eyes set well apart under straight brows, and her teeth were very white and strong. Yet there was a strange, spiritual attractiveness about the face. It promised mystery, elusiveness, strength, though there was a tinge of bitterness about the mouth and an expectation of sadness in the eyes.

"Janet! How are you? Always seem to be working!"

His eyes were the eyes of a lover, and though they found an answering light in hers, she was very much the queen of her own soul.

"So you are going out?"

"Yes; we are supposed to sail on the twenty-third. I'm going unattached."

"What does that mean?"

"I shall be tacked on to something when I get out there. Rather unsatisfactory. But everything is unsatisfactory about this war."

There was a look of pain deep down in her eyes.

"Will you come in and see mother?"

"How is Mrs. Yorke?"

"Not very strong. But come in."

She repeated the invitation in a way that made it a challenge, and Hammersley was too sensitive not to understand her meaning.

"Of course. And afterwards——"

"Well?"

"I want to talk to you. Let's go down through the woods."

"All right."

She pulled off her gardening gloves and took him into the house, where he spent a quarter of an hour talking to a nervous, flower-faced old lady who looked at him with pathetic eyes. The Yorke had been unfortunate, for Wentworth Yorke had died in prison after being sentenced for fraud. The old lady had about £200 a year in Government stock, and the Yorke had come to some quiet place where they could be as proud as they pleased. Scarshott had tried to be kind to them in a pitying, tolerant fashion, but Janet had refused to be pitied with a fierceness that had offended certain old ladies.

Hammersley did his duty, and Mrs. Yorke seemed to understand things perfectly when he pretended that he was expected at home. It was Janet who led the way into the pine woods—not as a girl luring on her lover, but as a woman who deigned to hear what a man might wish to say.

"Janet, do you realise things?"

He was pale with the intensity of his emotion.

"I am human, Pierce."

"This damnable war! Of course, I expect to come back—everyone does. But you know what I mean."

They were deep in the woods, and in the midst of their gloom and mystery. She turned and faced him, and her pride was an appeal.

"What am I to imagine——"

"Good God! Don't you know I love you? I came here to tell you."

She looked at him with an air of suffering aloofness.

"Perhaps I know. But I do not know yet how you love me. You remember all about my father——"

"What difference does that make?"

"Every difference. Think."

He flushed slightly.

"You mean?"

"Try to stand in my place. Do you think I have pride?"

"It's what I ask for—pride. I don't want some silly sop of a girl with fluffy hair."

"Well?"

He looked at her fixedly.

"Do you imagine I think I am conferring a favour?"

"All men do, though the best of them don't enlarge on it. It is the other people——"

He straightened himself with a quick lifting of the head.

"Exactly. Janet, will you let me take you down to Orchards to-morrow and boast about my luck? May I go swaggering through Scarshott with you at my side?"

Her voice had a kind of hushed passion.

"Do you love me that way?"

"Dear heart—yes."

Her eyes lit up for him with a light that was sacred.

"Pierce, you shall never regret it!"

"Oh, my dear! How wonderful you are!"

She let herself be taken, let her mouth meet his.

Pierce Hammersley had promised to make the affair public, and an ideal occasion was provided for him next day. Scarshott was holding a war fête in Sir Lionel Phelp's park. Everyone was to be there, and there were women who counted on seeing Hammersley.

He sent a note to Janet:

"DEAR,—I want you to come to this function. I am going to show you off. I will send our car up for you at three."

"PIERCE."

He had always loved shocking people with picturesque impertinences, but his heart ruled that afternoon's adventure. Hammersley was on the watch for Janet's coming, yet he did not go to her the moment she appeared. This girl had mettle, a mysterious valour that delighted the artist in him. She was in enemy's country, and he watched her walk up the long grass slope towards the Scarshott crowd with a kind of fierce serenity that stirred his blood. He guessed that she was feeling very much alone, a subtle-sensed creature at war with this crowd of complacency. Her dress was of the simplest, a soft cornflower blue, and her hat threw a mellow shadow over her face.

He went out at last to meet her.

"Thank you for coming—thank you eternally!"

She smiled proudly.

"You will not let them eat me up!"

"I want to make a state progress."

Hammersley was thorough, exultantly thorough, that afternoon. He took his homage and laid it like a cloak under Janet's feet, and Scarshott was astonished. There were secret thrills of feminine distress; little dream romances melted in the air.

Porteous Hammersley found his wife at his elbow.

"What—has—happened to Pierce?"

Hammersley Senior had a bemused look.

"My dear, he's engaged to that girl. Hasn't he told you?"

"Good heavens, Porteous! Why, Yorke was—"

"Tut, tut! Not so loud, Sophie. We are forgetting such things. I'll admit I was flabbergasted when he brought her up to me. After all, she's the most striking-looking girl here."

Mrs. Hammersley gulped.

"Take me home, Porteous. How mothers have to suffer!"

But Pierce's blood was afire, warmed by the glowing grace of the girl at his side. He loved dignity—that subtle, tranquil poise that gapings and chatterings cannot abash. He had never seen such a Janet as this. She was unique in such a crowd, softly dominant, mysteriously proud. Even his vanity had its reward. He had created a sensation, but not quite the sensation he had expected.

The problem ripened after dinner.

"Pierce, my boy, what about this engagement of yours?"

"Isn't it perfectly in order, sir?"

"Your mother is greatly upset. Bit of a shock. Besides—"

"You mean about her father?"

"Well—yes."

"Supposing you had been a blackguard, dad, it would have been rather hard lines on me if I had been damned socially for you."

Mr. Hammersley studied his cigar.

"I'm not raising objections, Pierce. The times are abnormal; these love affairs are rather rapid."

"Janet is superb. You always had a quick eye for a fine woman, dad."

His father chortled modestly.

"Truth in that."

"Would you want to marry some tow-haired fool like the Dixon girl? Money? Of course some of them have money. But we Hammersleys have the money. I can afford to marry a real woman. Isn't there sense in that?"

"Very sound, Pierce. But you will have to persuade your mother."

Then Hammersley grew restive.

"Good heavens! Does a man's mother want to pour vinegar into the wine when he's taking his last drink before going out to that hell? You're a man, dad, and you're reasonable—you understand."

Porteous gave the port decanter an ironical look.

"Your mother is an ambitious woman, Pierce. But go and talk to her. And, Pierce—"

"Yes?"

"Don't be—sarcastic or—clever. She doesn't understand it."

"No; beat the pompous big drum! You're a sportsman, dad."

Hammersley emerged very hot but triumphant from that domestic scene with his mother.

"On this solemn occasion," she said to

him. "I must sacrifice my prejudices. I am so very jealous for you, Pierce. You had better bring Jane here to-morrow."

"Janet, mother."

"I stand corrected. There is a more aristocratic flavour about the name of Janet. In your absence, my dear boy, I will afford—Janet—every advantage—in the way of self-culture. She might like French lessons."

Pierce delivered himself of an inward "Oh, damn!"

"Thanks, mater. She speaks French and German. She's much better educated than any girl in Scarshott."

"Indeed!"

"You see, she's a gentlewoman, mother. No, I didn't say 'lady.' And I'm horribly proud of her."

Sophia Hammersley told him to kiss her. "What extraordinary things men are!" she said to herself. "Such blind idealists! Of course, Pierce will raise the girl—socially. It should be the making of her—the cat!"

So the elder Hammersleys accepted the situation, arguing that the times were abnormal and that they could not quarrel with an only son a few days before he went on active service. Janet made a formal appearance next day in the Orchards' drawing-room, where Mrs. Sophia persuaded her to feel that she had been raised up to live in the company of the gods. The magnanimous condescension—for Pierce's sake—shone like fresh white plaster on a wall.

"I hope you will make my son a very good wife."

The emphasis on the "hope" trailed a flicker of doubt after it.

Pierce walked back with Janet to Yew Cottage a man wholly delighted with the woman of his choice. He had bought her a diamond-and-sapphire ring at Granston's, the jewellers, and she had given him a little gold signet that had belonged to her grandfather, and he swore that it would bring him luck.

"You need not go in yet, dear."

"No."

"I want to wander and talk. I feel a garrulous and expectant sort of idiot. Let's go down through the woods."

She was in a silent mood, with a shadow as of much thinking in her eyes. The family function at Orchards had hurt her pride, and she suspected that Pierce did not realise that she had let herself be humiliated for his sake.

But he noticed her silence and her aloofness.

"What is troubling my Mona Lisa?"

"I was seriously considering my new responsibilities."

"Me?"

"The whole house of Hammersley."

His eyes flashed laughter.

"Oh, the mater! You need not take her seriously."

"I'm afraid I am a restive animal."

"Janet, the mater patronises everybody. If she weren't my mater I should hate her like poison. Let it go under your feet. The dad is different."

"I rather like your father," she confessed; "but if I hadn't cared very much for somebody I should have flamed up this afternoon. I'll try and be less of an egoist."

He swept an arm over her shoulder.

"You adorable rebel! I'm a rebel myself. Of course, nine-tenths of Scarshott is superfluous; nine-tenths of the British middle class is superfluous—we should do better without it. But let's try to forget the fools, dear; I have just four more days."

His call to the woman in her rang true. She turned to him with sudden touching tenderness.

"Yes, we alone matter for the moment. I'll wait for you, dear, and I'll be proud in your pride."

"Heart of mine——"

"Just four days. I know now that I—love you."

For two days they were utterly happy, and then the shadow of the great war loomed over them with a sadness that was not to be ignored. They were conscious of the passing of the hours; and with a quick spasm of pain would come the thought: "At this time three days hence we shall no longer be together."

Yet it was during these sadder hours that Janet began to know her man, and in knowing him to fear for him. He would lie with his head in her lap under some Scotch fir and talk and talk, with his eyes staring at the sky. Love seemed to give her subtle insight—an insight that was fraught with vague misgivings. She began to understand Pierce Hammersley's weaknesses, and perhaps she loved him with a new mother love because of them.

He was a charming, highly strung egoist.

His individualism was still fierce and critical; it had not learnt to subordinate itself—nor to offer itself blindly. His very cleverness made him undisciplined, as discipline is understood in war.

He hated routine and authority, and sometimes his voice was inclined to be querulous.

He criticised everybody and everything, and even his enthusiasms were a little overflashed. She gathered that in his heart of hearts he hated the life of a soldier.

A slow fear for him began to grow in her, and she could not help asking herself questions. Would he stand the strain? Had he not too much imagination? There

was no disloyalty in these doubts of hers; she was very quick and sensitive, and somehow she had an uncanny feeling that she was right. She could have wished him less impatient, less ready to let that insubordinate individualism of his flare out against those in authority.

"Don't you take things rather too much to heart, Pierce?"

"I? Well, I hate inefficiency and cadishness and red tape."

"Why not take them for granted?"

"I suppose I'm a bad soldier in that I don't see why I should have my life fooled away by some idiot in a red hat."

"My dear, the man in the red hat may feel very bad about it."

"Not a bit. He probably has no imagination. We don't specialise in brains, child."

He was very excited the last day, with his consciousness concentrating itself on the great adventure ahead of him. He felt rather heroic and very much in the public eye, but there were moments when his face looked miserable.

"I have just been to make my will, Janet. Yes, I have something to leave, and I have settled it all on you."

"Dear man, but I—"

"I feel just as though we had been married, and I want to know that you will be all right."

He said good-bye to her in the little front room at Yew Cottage, holding her very tightly in his arms and kissing her with tragic intensity.

"God bless you, my Janet! I shall come back again—don't worry."

She had a last glimpse of him hurrying out of the gate, and waving to her as the car carried him away. His face looked white and strained. There was no doubt about his loving her.

A dusky land splashed with purple, a land with golden cliffs based in the blue of sea, a land of heat, flies and dust—such was the Gallipoli Peninsula as Pierce Hammersley remembered it. He landed one gentle August morning on "W" Beach,



"God bless you, my Janet! I shall come back again—don't worry"

amid a crowd of Greeks, Indians with mule carts, and men in dirty khaki who kicked up the dust as they plodded to and fro.

He was to join the 74th Sootshires, and his kit was tumbled into a mule cart and a Tommy given him as a guide. They went up from the beach and along the high ground, with the Asiatic coast melting into a blue-grey haze and Imbros a patch of purple across the north. Pierce had slept on a table in the saloon, and his breakfast had been primitive. His eyes had a dull, tired look, and all the strange new life of the place interested him not at all.

On the road above "X" Beach he met his first shell. It just came whining from nowhere and exploded over the beach.

Pierce Hammersley flinched, and then suddenly stiffened himself. He walked on with a queer, restless light in his eyes and a pinched look about the nostrils.

"What was that—shrapnel?"

The Tommy with him had not taken the least notice of the shell.

"Shrapnel, sir. Nothing doing."

"Are they giving us much shelling?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir. Sometimes they just have a bang at a wagon."

The question of courage is experimental; nor can one be sure how any particular man will react to danger. The stimulus of the moment counts for so much; many men are upheld and inspired by the feeling of comradeship; a few are blessed with a kind of irresponsible audacity.

Now, there was no doubt at all Pierce Hammersley reacted badly to active service—as he found it.

The officers of the 74th Sootshires did not take to Hammersley, and the dislike was mutual.

As for the C.O., he was the most wonderful man—far too noble for Hammersley to understand him. The faults were all on the side of the egotistical and impatient boy. Colonel Barnack rose at five every morning, and spent the first half-hour of the day praying in his dug-out. Even in moments of danger his face had a sublime radiance. He carried a little New Testament in his pocket, and often you might see him sitting in some secluded corner reading the Word of God. He discountenanced cards and whisky.

"We are here for England," he would say to his officers. "England—and our honour."

Whenever he had to send an officer on a dangerous duty he would take him into his dug-out and pray with him.

"This is for the salvation of your soul, my boy. Through tribulation we are made heroes."

But he was most wonderful with the wounded. The lads' eyes would brighten when they saw their beloved colonel bending over them. Sometimes Barnack's eyes would fill with tears. He had been known to sit up half the night beside some stricken hero, moistening his lips with water, stroking his forehead, and reading God's Word to him by the light of a candle.

Barnack called himself a Puritan. He was a noble fellow. His men longed to die for him when he smiled!

Hammersley and his new C.O. did not understand each other, for the youngster could not emulate the English piety and goodness of the older man.

Barnack confessed to doubting Pierce.

"This lad—strikes me as selfish. He has not learnt to give up the vanities of this world."

The adjutant agreed with him.

"The beggar needs chastening. He has been spoilt at home."

Yet to Hammersley those first few days were a foretaste of hell. He was humiliated by discovering his own fear. His mannerisms and his reserve did not help to make him popular, and his brother officers set out to chasten him with a thoroughness that was neither very wise nor sympathetic.

"Let the beggar rough it a bit," was the verdict—a judgment that was not encouraging to a man with a temperament.

The colonel was nobly stern with him. He called Hammersley into his dug-out one afternoon, and spoke words of sweet solemnity.

"He who would save his life will lose it, Mr. Hammersley. I do not think, sir, that you are a religious man."

Pierce had nothing to say.

"We have to humble ourselves, my boy. Think of the prayers you said at your mother's knee. Is it possible that you do not believe in God?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Then search for Him, my boy—find Him, for find Him you must. Pray—pray. God chastens those whom He loves."

The Puritan pondered Hammersley's case, and beheld a certain wisdom in not sparing him.

"That boy must be taught his lesson."

But Hammersley was merely exasperated.

One day at the end of his first week Hammersley went out for a solitary walk away towards the French lines. The afternoon was quiet; the Turks were doing no shelling; the sun shone and the sea lay like glass. But Hammersley was soul-sick and rebellious.

"This damned humiliation!"

Hammersley threw himself down in the heather and stared at the sky.

He felt sick, thinking of the glory that might have been and was not. What wild tosh the journalists talked about English valour and the romance of war! Flies, glare, smells, dirt, sick men, the eternal menace of death! Good Lord, how sick he was of the whole business! What good were they doing out there? Always some muddle or other—the fine old English tradition.

He tried to lose himself in thinking of Janet and home, but his love was a kind of anguish. He wanted to see her again—he wanted to know that he would see her again. Eight weeks had gone since he had left England, and not a single letter had he received! Curse those who were responsible! Did they think that a man in the trenches was too busy to receive letters? He wondered what Janet was doing. Was she worrying? Was she sad? Oh, hell! There were times when he had dreamed of heroism, and now he had discovered Barnack, bombs, flies on jam, corpses over the parapet, yellow, miserable faces, men covered with sores. What was the use of it all? Loving Janet did not help him. It only made him more rebellious, more passionately eager to live.

He glanced at his wrist-watch. Tea-time. They would be eating biscuits and jam, with

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black swarms of flies in maddening rivalry, and drinking stewed tea. No, he would not go back yet; he was off duty—there were few precious moments that he could call his own.

It was about six o'clock when Hammersley trudged up the communication trench that led to the support trenches held by the 74th Sootshires. And suddenly the Turks started shelling that particular sector, dropping their shells over the first line and support trenches, and shrapnelling the communication trench. The English guns began to yap back. An artillery duel was developing.

The noise and the danger fretted Hammersley's nerves. Why did the fools want to kick up all this din? What was the use of it? Why didn't they let well alone? It all seemed so senseless, so horrible, so futile. The big howitzers began clanging in the gully below as he reached the support trenches, and Hammersley hated those howitzers. They were always stirring up trouble.

"Mr. Hammersley, you are wanted, sir."

"Where?"

"At head-quarters."

A group of officers had gathered outside the big dug-out that served as a mess, and Hammersley caught a curious smile on the faces of one or two of them. He heard the colonel speaking.

"B Company will go up. You will report to Colonel Fullerton, Captain Goss. Is Mr. Hammersley here yet?"

Hammersley stood in the doorway and saluted.

"Here, sir."

Colonel Barnack came out into the sunlight. He was the sort of man the English love to read about—a mixture of General Gordon and General Booth. His grave and serene eyes looked straight at Hammersley.

"You are late, sir."

"I was off duty, sir, and I had asked you—"

"An Englishman is never off duty, Mr. Hammersley. Captain Goss, you will move off, please, and God go with you."

Captain Goss was a sandy, hard-bitten piece of sarcastic grimness. He passed on the colonel's petulances to Hammersley.

"That does us out of dinner. For God's sake, Hammersley, get a move on! Your platoons are sticking to the ground!"

Hammersley's eyes gave a sullen glare.

"Shall I provide a fatigue party to bring up your dinner?"

Goss turned on him like a fierce dog.

"Another word and I'll report you! I don't stand any insolence from my juniors!"

The front-line trench which they were to reinforce had been christened "Dirty Dick's," and it was particularly dirty that August evening. The Turks had been

pounding the parapet as though they were preparing for an attack. In going up, B Company found itself blocking the way of the regimental stretcher-bearers who were coming down with their horrible bundles of blood and khaki. There was some shouting, cursing and disorder, with an occasional high explosive flinging dirt down into the winding way, but the infantry flattened themselves against the wall and let the stretcher-bearers through.

"Dirty Dick's" proved to be a most unsavoury place—a jumble of sandbags, earth, live and dead men, dirt and blood. The Turkish shells had knocked down the parapet in places, and the men were standing ready to repel the expected attack. An excited captain was going up and down, shouting all sorts of encouraging nonsense. Shells were exploding overhead, and once a high explosive landed in the trench and made a ghastly mess of the men in the vicinity.

Hammersley's face was the colour of chalk. This was his first real glimpse of the filthy horrors of modern war, and they shocked the depths of his soul. Moreover, he was most damnably afraid. He had seen these fragments of humanity littered about; and it was not the fear of death that gripped him, but a fear of being loathsomely mangled, torn, rent open. Nothing but a desperate pride kept him from playing the coward, for his mouth was dry as a brick and his loins felt broken.

He posted his two platoons along the section allotted to them, and stood by to await developments. An unused periscope lay on the fire-platform opposite him; Hammersley picked it up, put it in position, and, leaning against the parapet, busied himself with observing the Turkish positions. He could see nothing but a stretch of bare ground, some barbed wire and a ridge of yellowish dirt topped with sandbags; but even peering into the mirror of a periscope seemed better than doing nothing.

A shell burst close overhead and shrapnel spattered into the trench, but no one was hit. Hammersley had flattened himself against the parapet, and almost at the same moment Captain Goss came round the traverse with a sulky look in his narrow eyes. He spotted Hammersley, and frowned.

"Mr. Hammersley."

"Hallo!"

"I want to speak to you."

He drew Pierce aside.

"Look here, Hammersley, this won't do at all."

"What do you mean?"

"You must set the men a better example. Keep moving. You can't go flattening

yourself against the parapet like that, don't you know."

Hammersley went scarlet.

"Do you mean to suggest—"

"Rot! I'm not suggesting anything."

"I was keeping a look out on the Turkish trenches."

"Leave that to someone else and get a move on. It's up to you to let the men see you about."

Hammersley flung his hand up in a salute, faced about, and began walking to and fro along the trench with fury in his eyes. He was no longer afraid, but he had ceased to care what happened to his unit, to the brigade, to the division, to any damned thing that was English. The devil of revolt stormed in him. His pride had been grossly humiliated, and a man of Hammersley's temperament fights on his pride and his nerves. Such men are capable of mad and desperate obstinacies and hatreds. They have given the world heroes, martyrs, inspired traitors driven to treachery by some blackguard act on the part of the country they served.

The shelling ceased about sunset, but the Turks delivered no attack. B Company remained on duty in the front-line trenches all that night, indulging in bursts of rapid fire just to show the Turks that the men in the English trenches were rather jumpy and on the alert. The scare was over soon after dawn, and B Company went back to the support trenches to breakfast on tea and bully beef.

Captain Goss reported to Colonel Barnack, and his report included a confidential character sketch of Lieutenant Hammersley.

"That new fellow has cold feet, sir."

Colonel Barnack looked pained.

"I wish you would not use slang, Captain Goss. I don't understand it. What do you mean by 'cold feet'?"

"He was in a devil of a— Beg pardon—I mean he was slightly afraid."

The colonel looked very solemn.

"Does an English officer ever feel afraid, sir?"

"Well, not exactly."

"This young man needs tempering in the furnace, Captain Goss. It shall be my duty to see that it is done. I hope my duty is quite plain to me."

Janet Yorke had many things to bear, though the hostility of the feminine part of Scarshott troubled her less than did Mrs. Hammersley's pompous proclaiming that she was making the best of the situation. She even kissed Janet with patronising unction.

"What sacrifices we are making!" was her cry. And Janet felt herself to be the living sign and symbol of Sophia Hammersley's self-renunciation.

She went thrice a week to Orchards, and did her duty by sitting in the great, solemn drawing-room and talking to her future mother-in-law. Both these women hated each other, and yet they agreed to meet on the common ground of a sentimental devotion to one particular man.

Mrs. Sophia was utterly complacent in her admiration of her son. She had given birth to him, he was hers—therefore he was all that could be desired. She did not love as Janet loved him, with a passionate, wide-eyed tenderness that was all the more wonderful because she knew that he was human. Your perfect man would be detestable, and the imperfections of a man make him the human child of the woman who loves him. The Pierce Hammersley of his mother's vision was a serene, tailor-made, genteel prig; but Janet saw in him the rebel, the coward, the sensitive, proud boy who might do splendidly or cover himself with shame.

She feared and yearned, while Mrs. Sophia boasted.

"Of course, Pierce will be a splendid officer. He's so clever and so popular. I quite anticipate his bringing home the V.C."

And Janet wondered at this woman who was so grossly ignorant, so selfishly blind when she looked at her own son.

"Pierce is very proud," she said guardedly, "and pride helps."

"Of course Pierce has pride. But I do not quite follow your argument."

Janet knew that it would be quite hopeless to try to make her understand that her son was a sensitive mixture of cowardice and heroism, selfishness and generosity. Mrs. Hammersley knew nothing of imagination, atmosphere, temperamental idiosyncrasies. Her son was just the gallant, stupid fellow in the pictures, striking heroic attitudes and waving a sword.

Porteous Hammersley was more human. He wore an air of hearty cheerfulness, but the man in him seemed to feel for his son.

Janet developed a liking for Pierce's father. She detected the origins of Pierce in him and secret diffidences hidden beneath a bland dignity. He showed a desire to treat Janet with paternal fondness. She appealed to him; he found that he could talk to her and be understood.

Very often his hearty optimism would disappear, and Janet had glimpses of Porteous Hammersley's thoughts.

"Terrible ordeal—terrible ordeal—this war! Wonder the boys stand it!"

Perhaps he was conscious of certain streaks of cowardice in himself, and they helped him to infer what his son might be suffering.

"No letters yet, Janet—no real letters, I mean. Pierce must be in the thick of it

by now. What a romantic enterprise! Don't worry, my dear girl; the Hammersleys were always lucky."

She caught him staring at nothing with glassy eyes.

"Pierce will behave like a gentleman. Yes, it will be all right."

As for Scarshott town, it treated Janet with considerable coldness and affected to pity Pierce. It indulged in all sorts of subtle criticisms and prophecies. Pierce had always been eccentric, and this engagement of his was just a bit of war madness. It was fortunate that he had not married the girl, for when he returned—if he ever returned—he might realise his own foolishness and get out of the affair as best he could. Some people were glad of the chance of pitying Sophia Hammersley. She was not popular. She had expected her son to marry into one of the county families.

Scarshott was still full of the pre-war littlenesses of England, and Janet Yorke lived apart from such things. She was waiting for Pierce's letters. One had reached her from Malta, two more from Mudros, and though they were dear love-letters they were not the poignant, human documents that her love and fear foreshadowed.

At last they came—a batch of them—those letters from that land of flies and death. She was strangely, tenderly

methodical in her reading of them. She wanted to get the human sequence, and so she arranged them, date by date, before she read a word.

Her face grew grave as she read, for the character of the man unfolded itself from page to page. The impatient and scornful individualist was in the ascendant, and her forefeeling of some impending catastrophe was strengthened. Pierce cared nothing for the censor; he had always expressed himself with virile frankness; the so-called soldierly spirit that accepts every blunder and says nothing had not been developed in him as yet.

As she read on she saw the rebel in him growing defiant and contemptuous.

Everything had been mismanaged. Men were being sacrificed to no purpose. The whole adventure was a cynical political gamble.

As for his fellow officers, they were detestable, half-educated bounders who sneered at any man who had had a University education. The soul of the great adventure was dead; it had died with those fine gentlemen who had left their bodies on the beaches at the landing. The troops were sick and sullen. Everybody realised that the game was up.



"I'm sorry, sir;
but I refuse to
obey your orders"

From a soldier's point of view the letters were scandalous, full of bitter truths that were not ripe for the telling. Janet could trace scorn, disillusionment and angry misery in every line. And she bowed her head over these letters with love, pity, fear and shame. For the egoist in Pierce Hammersley showed all its fierce petulance, its hatred of restraint, its lack of the finer humility that smiles and carries on.

He was in great danger, but there seemed something looming over him more terrible than danger. She had a feeling that he might do some desperate, violent thing. He said that he had lost his patriotism.

She sat down and wrote. It was a very wonderful letter, a very tender, rallying letter, but even as she wrote it her intuition seemed to tell her that it would reach him too late.

There is no doubt that Pierce Hammersley was unfortunate in his first experience of active service. He had a difficult temperament, and he quite failed to live up to Colonel Barnack's soldierly ideals.

The colonel worshipped such men as Cromwell. He did not know what fear was—at least, he said so—and he looked upon fear as an evil thing to be fought as a good English Christian fights the devil. Unfortunately for Hammersley, the colonel had ideas on man-making. He could be stern and he could shed tears; we English know all about such noble characters, for we have read of them on Sundays in our children's books.

But Colonel Barnack set out to make a man of Hammersley conscientiously, with prayer and fasting, and a sense of duty to England and the cause.

"Mr. Hammersley, you will take a listening patrol out into No Man's Land to-night."

"Yes, sir."

Or:

"Mr. Hammersley, the sappers have asked for a fatigue party to help in digging that new trench. You will take the party out after dark."

No pleasant adventure, as Hammersley discovered, for he had a man killed and three wounded, and came back with a bullet-hole in his cap.

All these grim little adventures were given him by Colonel Barnack in the interests of discipline and self-mastery, but Pierce Hammersley had a feeling that he was being penalised. These men did not understand each other. Their temperaments clashed, and Hammersley's suffered.

Once he had the temerity to protest.

"These are most unsoldierly words, sir," said his colonel. "I give you these enter-

prises for your own good—that you may learn what danger is and how to face it. Think of England—of your dear mother at home and her pride in you."

Hammersley said no more, but he took that reproof savagely to heart. He drifted into a very bitter mood, and this bitterness increased in him. The life was wearing his nerves—this life, with the heat, the flies, the eternal round of danger. He was most damnably lonely, and no one seemed to understand.

Then the crash came. The 74th Soot-shires were up in the front line, and it had been arranged by the staff that a little local attack should be made on a Turkish redoubt that had been making itself a nuisance. Everybody knew what these local attacks meant. The men called them "More free passes to hell."

Hammersley heard the news, and a kind of white heat filled his brain. He walked into the mess, where a small crowd was discussing the coming attack. The colonel and the adjutant were not there.

"Who's going to qualify for a halo?"

"Haven't heard yet."

"The old man ought to toss up."

Then they heard Hammersley speaking in a strange, hard voice.

"You need not worry, gentlemen. It is quite obvious that I shall be detailed to lead the suicide party."

His face was dead white and his eyes shone. No one spoke for a moment.

"What's the grievance, man?"

"Oh, nothing. I happen to be unpopular. One of you will have to take my place—that is all."

An orderly appeared in the doorway of the dug-out.

"Mr. Hammersley, the Colonel wants you, sir."

Hammersley gave a queer kind of smile and looked round the mess.

"You see," he said, "I was right. But this time the dog is going to bite."

He went to Colonel Barnack's dug-out, and stood there stiffly, with a glint of madness in his eyes.

"Mr. Hammersley, this is a very solemn occasion. I grant you the honour of taking the men over the parapet at eighteen-thirty this evening. Now, my boy, please make any arrangements—"

"I have made them, sir."

"If you would like to take one of these little Testaments with you—"

"I'm sorry, sir; but I refuse to obey your orders."

Colonel Barnack looked at him in bewilderment.

"You refuse? Do I understand you to say that you refuse to face death for your country?"

"I do, sir. As a protest—"

"A protest! A protest—against what?"
Hammersley gave a semi-hysterical laugh.
"Against everything! Against myself,
against you—the whole show!"
"You had better see the doctor, sir, or
shall I have to—"
"Yes, sir; you will be so good as to put
me under arrest."

Pierce Hammersley was dismissed the Service by order of a general court-martial, the charges of cowardice and refusal to obey orders being proven against him.

Early in October Janet Yorke received that letter in which Pierce told her the truth. For a month he had sent her nothing but field post cards, leaving her to guess at the reason of his reticence, and Janet's guessing had come marvellously near the truth.

Pierce was on his way home, a disgraced man, as he put it, and proud to be disgraced. His soul was on fire and burning with a sense of wrong, and in reading his bitter description of the things that had happened to him she realised how Pierce had broken himself in a mood of mad revolt. He was full of defiance, and ready to flourish his defiance before the eyes of the world.

"I'll take good care that those confounded gossips at Scarshott know the truth before I come home. I don't call myself an Englishman any longer, and that is something to boast of. I pray most devoutly that that country of shams and hypocrisies and political cowardice may be humbled to the ground."

It was evident that the blood was still so hot in him that he was conscious of no humiliation; nor did he seem to realise the anguish his disgrace might cause at home. He ended by asking her to go and break the news to the people at Orchards.

"I expect they will be a bit upset about it. Tell them not to worry."

She wept over that letter, shocked by his immense egotism, and yet loving him, because of her compassion and because she foresaw the bitter humiliations he would have to bear. She rallied her pride and went to Orchards, more sorry for the father than she was for the son.

Janet found Porteous Hammersley pottering about in one of the glasshouses. He gave one inquiring, birdlike look at her intense face and followed her out into the garden.

"News, Janet?"

"Yes."

"Not very good?"

"I'll tell you. Take me where we shall be alone."

The French window of the library stood open. They entered the room, and Pierce's father drew the window to after him.

"Not killed, Janet?"

"No; nor wounded. Besides, you would have heard."

She sat down in one of the big chairs by the fire, and Porteous stood watching her.

"I think I can guess."

Her eyes lifted to his.

"You?"

"Pierce has got himself into trouble?"

"He has been court-martialled and dismissed the Service. Cowardice and refusing to obey orders. Of course, someone was a beast to him, and he went mad."

"Show me the letter, child."

"No; I think it is better that you should not see it."

He stared at the fire, and his figure seemed to shrink and his cheeks to fall in.

"I had a sort of premonition."

"Of this?"

"You see, Pierce was always restive—touchy. Perhaps we spoilt him—"

He lapsed again into silence, and there was a gleam of moisture in his eyes.

"We must stand by the boy."

He seemed to address the words to himself, but Janet rose up and laid her hands on his arm.

"How good you are! Of course we will fight for him. Now you know that I really cared."

"My dear!"

All his pomposity left him. He was just a plain man, suffering acutely and hungry for affection. He took Janet's face between his hands and kissed her.

"I always believed in you. Pierce saw things clearly then. God bless you!"

He turned abruptly and went to the window to recover his composure. The yellow leaves were falling from the trees and dappling the autumn lawns with gold.

"I had better tell his mother. Can't you stay the night with us, Janet?"

"There is my mother."

"Of course."

"I will come early to-morrow."

She left him to the ordeal, knowing that it would be an ordeal, and that he would get but little comfort from Mrs. Sophia.

And so it proved. Pierce's mother would not accept the news at first, and when she accepted it it was with scorn and indignation. Her complacent soul refused to be wounded through her son.

"Pierce must be the victim of some gross injustice. If he disobeyed orders he must have had very adequate reasons."

And then she declaimed stridently:

"Everyone knows that our staff is rotten. I don't believe there is a competent general in the whole Army. This scandal will have to be made public. You must insist on Sir Joseph bringing the matter up in the House."

Porteous looked like a man nipped and trembling with cold.

"My dear, it was for cowardice," he said. "Cowardice? Impossible!"

When he left her she was staring with a kind of stupid, wide-eyed indignation at the Dresden figures on the marble mantelpiece.

A few days later the editor of the *Scarshott Gazette* received a very queer letter that was sent to him for publication:

"DEAR SIR,—I shall be glad if you will have this letter published in your paper. It has been my good fortune to have been court-martialled and dismissed the Service for cowardice and refusing to obey orders. I am returning to Scarshott shortly, and I wish my position to be quite clear. I have every right to be proud of my experiences; they have taught me the infamous and cynical incompetence of those in authority.

"I hope that I have made my position quite clear.—Believe me, faithfully yours,

"PIERCE HAMMERSLEY.

"Late Lieutenant attached
"74th Sootshire Regiment."

The editor of the *Scarshott Gazette* happened to be a rather mean little man; moreover, he owed Porteous Hammersley a grudge. Instead of burning that letter as the evidence of a young man's mad and sensitive perversity, he toddled round and showed it to his lawyer, satisfied himself as to his own safety, and published it in the next weekly edition of his paper.

Pierce's letter caused a first-class sensation in Scarshott, and a day or two later the notice of his court-martial appeared in the *Gazette*. Pierce had never been particularly popular in the town. His temperamental cleverness had puzzled people, and mediocrity does not like to be puzzled.

Moreover, even the educated part of Scarshott was still grossly ignorant of war psychology. The average mind is hopelessly unsubtle; it sees only crude colours, seemingly obvious movements. It separates qualities and pushes them to extremes. Thus there are no intermediate states between cowardice and courage, vice and virtue, cheerfulness and misery. There are many men who still do not realise that ninety-nine men out of a hundred are physical cowards, and that only gross excitement, some high stimulus or a grim sense of duty make them the masters of their natural fear. Tell the fat and comfortable man of fifty that English troops have run away, and he will look shocked and confounded. He has never known danger, has never tried to imagine what men have had to bear in this war.

Only those who have been on the field have any right to judge.

But Scarshott judged Pierce Hammersley, as pigs fattening in a pound might judge a highly bred horse that has bolted after being badly handled. He was just a coward, and he had disgraced himself, and there were people who were not sorry. A few soft-hearted women may have pitied him, as women will—perhaps because women are subtler in divining spiritual things.

The blow fell most heavily on Porteous Hammersley. Good fellow that he was, he had lived for the fine flavour of success and social happiness, and in this great sorrow he discovered his own loneliness. He wanted a comrade in distress, someone who felt as bitterly as he did, and in his loneliness he turned to Janet Yorke.

He found in her a creature of fine and unexpected strength, and she in her turn was drawn to him by a compassionate weakness that was very lovable.

He showed no bitterness against Pierce.

"We must stand by the boy. I can understand how it all happened—even his writing of that mad letter."

"Wounded pride."

"And defiance. Somehow I feel responsible for all this, Janet. There is a lot of me in Pierce."

"Perhaps—the best of him."

He smiled at her sadly.

"You are trying to help me by flattery. I haven't told you yet about his mother."

"Well?"

"My wife is a very peculiar woman. She has disowned Pierce." He spoke as though he were apologising for Sophia. "I can't understand her. Of course, she is most bitterly disappointed. But even then—"

Janet hid her wonder and her scorn, for it was a new thing to her that a woman's monstrous self-conceit should be stronger than her love for her son.

"It can't last. She has only to see Pierce."

Porteous's face showed that he had no illusions as to his wife's temper.

"She is a very extraordinary woman. She never could bear having her comfort and her peace of mind interfered with. But what are we to do about Pierce?"

Janet sat staring at the fire, and Porteous Hammersley watched her as though he were beginning to have a blind faith in her courage.

Presently she turned to him.

"It will be very difficult. There are natures that cannot be driven or preached at. I am like that, so I know. There must be some great emotional appeal, a blaze of spiritual light, the ideal of self-sacrifice. There are men who would dance to meet

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death if a Chopin waltz were played to them. You have to touch their souls. We English are such fumlbers, so mute and stupid. I have often doubted whether England has a soul."

Hammersley nodded.

"Pierce is a sensitive instrument——"

"Yes; and some boor tried to play on him with a boot. Will you let me try?"

"My dear, you are my one hope."

A week later Pierce Hammersley came home. He strolled defiantly up from the station, perfectly turned out in mufti by a leading London tailor, a rose in his buttonhole and his chin in the air. His eyes had a hard light in them, and he looked squarely at the faces of the people he met, compelling himself and doing it well.

"Hallo, Moss! How are you?"

The old porter at the tannery gate nearly dropped off his stool.

"Not so bad, sir."

"Is Mr. Porteous here?"

"In 'is office, sir."

Pierce strolled on, nodding to a clerk whom he passed in the passage.

"My dear boy!"

Porteous Hammersley was alone, seated at his desk. He rose up, dropping his pince-nez, his face suffused with a sudden flush.

Pierce stood stiffly before him.

"Well, pater, am I to walk out again? You have the right to say, you know."

"Don't talk nonsense! Sit down, child. Have a cigar."

Porteous bustled about to hide his emotions. He poked the fire, brought out a box of cigars, pushed one of the big leather chairs forward.

Pierce Hammersley's upper lip quivered slightly.

"Of course you know everything?"

"Everything."

His father's eyes avoided his.

"You are very generous, pater."

"Not a bit—not a bit. I'm on your side, Pierce. Now let me hear all about it—everything."

Pierce sat down and told him, and they talked for an hour by the light of the fire. His father's face seemed to catch the shadows in hollows that had not been there a year ago, and his eyes had a hungry look.

"They treated you damned badly, my boy! It was your colonel who ought to have been cashiered. But, of course, in Scarshott——"

Pierce tossed his head like a swimmer throwing off spray.

"I knew what to expect of Scarshott; that's why I wrote that letter. I wanted no misunderstanding."

His father fiddled with the fire.

"What would you like to do? Go away for a while and travel?"

"Run away? Not a bit of it! Scarshott can go to hell for all I care! I'm not ashamed of anything. But if you and the mater would like me to go—— How is the mater?"

"Very upset, Pierce; it is no use concealing it. She is rather bitter against you, my boy. Your mother has always been—a very—very peculiar woman. But you can stay here as far as I am concerned."

"You always were a sportsman, dad. And then—there's Janet."

His eyes looked anxious and a little afraid.

"Have you seen Janet lately?"

"She was here this morning."

"I wonder if she will stand by me."

Porteous stared straight at his son.

"She is a very fine woman, is Janet. She is a woman worth keeping, Pierce. She would stand by a man through thick and thin if she thought he deserved it."

Pierce Hammersley flushed.

"I'll try and make her understand," he said.

Pierce did not attempt to see his mother, but walked up through the grey autumn dusk towards the pine woods and Yew Cottage. It seemed so strange to be home again, and stranger still to be in Scarshott as an outcast and a rebel. He was so full of defiance that his pride seized the initiative and declared war on the whole community. And yet he was afraid, desperately afraid of that meeting with Janet. She and his father seemed the only people who mattered; he had a dread of being despised by them.

There was a light in one of the upper windows of Yew Cottage, but the rest of the little house seemed to be in darkness. Pierce hesitated a moment at the gate, realising suddenly that there was a strange, incalculable force here that could not be defied. What would she say to him? What would he see in her eyes? For the first time his defiant pride faltered a little; he wanted those warm arms of hers round his neck; he wanted to feel that she cared—understood.

He walked up the gravel path and knocked at the door, and the thought crossed his mind that there was a tragic romanticism even in such things as brick porches and brass door-knockers. It was femininity that counted; Gallipoli had taught him that, with its mob of sick and miserable men in dirty uniforms, and never a petticoat or any homelike thing to be seen. It was a moment of tense expectancy, waiting there in the dusk and wondering how she would greet him.

Then he heard footsteps and the sound of a bolt being shot back.

"Who is it?"

"Pierce. I'm home."

It seemed to him that a soft spiritual perfume flowed out on him when the door opened.

"Is it you—really you?"

Her hands and face were white in the dusk, nor did they shrink from him.

"Janet, may I come in?"

Her hands made a movement towards him.

"Why do you ask? I've been waiting."

Then Pierce Hammersley's pride deserted him, and he found himself kissing those hands of hers and weeping over them with absurd tenderness.

"Oh, my dear!"

She closed the door, and mothered him into the little room, where a fire glowed red in the darkness. And that room seemed full of mystery and warmth and beautiful soft shadows and the dearness of her presence.

"Janet!"

She sat down in the low chair before the fire, and with the instinct of a child he knelt and let his head fall into her lap.

"I did not know I cared so much. I wondered whether you would let me come back to you."

"Didn't you trust me?"

"I have had so much bitterness. But you have waited to hear my side of it all?"

"Of course."

"I want to talk—I want to tell you everything. Shall we be quite alone?"

"Mother has had one of her heart attacks, and is in bed."

He raised his head suddenly and looked at her with white intentness.

"I wonder what you think of me? Would you be ashamed to walk through Scarshott?"

"Not yet."

"Why do you say 'not yet'?"

"Because I still believe in you."

"Janet, let me kiss you."

She bent over him with warm lips.

"Now talk—and I want you to talk as though you were talking to your own inner self and not to me."

He turned his face towards the fire and sat leaning against her knees, while her hands rested on his shoulders. She hoped for humility and a chastened manliness, but from the very beginning he talked to justify himself, letting all his bitterness break out into flames of scorn. He accused everybody, condemned everything. England was rotten; the Army a mere stomach on legs, its organisation contemptible. The men who had volunteered were being sacrificed with cynical indifference, while so many million slackers were being left to shirk at home. He had seen the English fighting man, and wanted to see no more of him. The nation

was decadent; everybody had lost faith out there. And why should a man throw his life away because some cad of a colonel chose to give him all the dirty work?

Hammersley talked himself back into his mood of wild defiance.

"I don't care! I mean to keep my head up! England is going to get the smashing she deserves!"

But Janet's eyes were full of a great sadness. He had not learnt his lesson yet, and she was wondering whether he would ever learn it.

Sophia Hammersley had betaken herself to Harrogate, where she bought a Pekinese puppy and was drawn about in a bath chair.

Pierce had returned to the ordinary routine of life, taking his share in the business of tanning, and trying to pretend that he liked it and that he did not care a snap of the fingers for the good people of Scarshott. But public opinion was not kind to him. The old women said that he had broken his mother's heart, which was nonsense. They also condemned Janet Yorke for remaining engaged to a man who had disgraced himself by cowardice. Old Porteous, they agreed, had always been too easy with his son. Moreover, Pierce himself outraged Scarshott's sense of responsibility. He bought a new car, and made a practice of driving ostentatiously about the town with an assumed serenity that exasperated people who happened to dislike him.

"That's class justice," grumbled a little bootmaker who was a Socialist. "He'd have been shot if he'd have been a mere Tommy. It's a capitalists' war. What d'you think the Hammersleys are making on leather?"

Yet though Pierce Hammersley showed himself utterly defiant, he was the most miserable man in Scarshott. The first flush of his bitterness had passed, and he found himself trying to conquer life with a philosophic arrogance that lacked emotion. He could not escape from self-analysis, and he discovered that a man cannot live alone, or exist in happiness without a sense of spiritual well-being. His own sensitive temperament made life more difficult. He could not satisfy himself that he had convinced the two people who really mattered—Janet and his father.

It was evident that Porteous Hammersley had aged, that he did not carry himself with the old debonair cheerfulness. As for Janet, she gave Pierce Hammersley the impression that she was waiting, watching, listening, and that her acceptance of life was not final. There were moments of mysterious reserve in her that baffled him. She made him feel that he was standing on the edge of a cliff, with darkness under his feet.

As for anything in khaki, Pierce Hammersley hated it, and if he consulted his own inclinations he would have faced about and fled whenever he met a soldier. The war was becoming so abominably aggressive. It seemed to be absorbing more and more of the life of the country, thrusting its grim presence into every home, or, like Death, stealing up and touching men upon the shoulder. England was passing through a phase of pessimism and querulous squabbling, but there was a new inspiration stirring the slow and casual British soul. Defeat and failure were rousing the country; men began to realise that this war was no sensational interlude—it was life itself, grim, remorseless, splendid. With reluctant slowness the peoples of Britain discovered that this war was no mere newspaper affair, but a stark fight for elemental things.

And in his heart of hearts Pierce Hammersley knew it. Man is a nation in

that passed about them. It happened also that the son of a local tradesman, who had done gallantly in France and had been given a commission, was home on leave. They chanced on this young man strolling up the High Street, a pleasant-faced and rather shy young hero, with a couple of delighted girls sharing his radiance. One of the great ladies of the neighbourhood stopped to speak to the second lieutenant, but she cut Hammersley as he passed.



They shook hands—proudly. "You ought to be pleased with yourself, Hammersley"

miniature, and the consciousness of a nation is made up of the massed psychical experiences of individual men. And during those winter months the peoples of Britain began to glimpse the sacrifices that fate demanded of them. The weakling squealed and argued about birth certificates and marriage licences, but in the hearts of the true men a new grimness and a new faith were born.

It happened one afternoon that Pierce and Janet walked down Scarshott High Street together, two proud and self-conscious creatures poignantly alive to all

Pierce had tried to meet the youngster's eyes and had failed, and a strange anguish of self-shame smote him. The defiance went out of him and his shoulders drooped.

Trust the quick perceptions of a woman. Janet had flushed, for his humiliation was hers. For the moment there was a pained fierceness in her eyes, and her upper lip quivered.

"Who was that?"

"Oh, young Jones. Got his star and Sam Brown. Where do you want to go, Janet?"

She knew that the street had suddenly become a place of public torture.

"I don't want anything. We promised to be back at four."

"Tea with the pater?"

"Yes. And then I must get home."

"All right."

They walked back to Orchards in silence, Pierce slouching along with his head down, Janet with a strained, white face and thinking eyes.

At Orchards they had tea in the library before a blazing fire, a comfortable tea with muffins and buttered toast and big chairs to lounge in, but it was a most unhappy meal, full of awkward silences and false attempts at cheerfulness. Porteous had the look of a moping bird. And Pierce was thinking of young Jones and the trenches where men did not sit in "club chairs" before a leaping fire.

After tea Janet rose to go.

"Are you coming with me?"

Of course he was going to walk home with her, but that evening there was something about Janet that made him afraid.

The night was fine and dry, and the sky full of crisp stars. Fallen leaves rustled against their feet, and the branches of the trees were nearly bare. Once Pierce tried to take Janet's hand, but she repulsed him gently. Their love had come to the crossways, and she was compelling herself towards the truth.

"Your father is not well, Pierce."

"Isn't he?"

"Haven't you noticed it?"

Her voice accused him. She walked at his side with an air of expectant aloofness, and Pierce Hammersley was vaguely afraid of her.

"You must have seen."

He answered her almost sullenly:

"I'm not blind. I can't help the pater worrying."

"But what is your attitude? Are you going to let him go on worrying?"

They had reached the pine woods, but Janet did not turn aside towards the cottage. She walked on slowly into the woods, where the black tops of the trees hid the stars. Pierce Hammersley followed half a step behind, trying to rally his spirit of defiance and hail himself master of his own soul.

Janet paused suddenly close to the trunk of a stunted tree. The ground under it was covered with brown pine needles, and the spread of its flat top had kept off the dew.

"Do you remember those days six months ago?"

Her voice had an intimate sadness that made him wince.

"I was very happy then—even though you were going away. Your father, too, was happy."

"Are you turning against me?"

"Is that all that you have to say?"

He hung his head, and she stood staring bleak-eyed into the darkness. Suddenly she began to speak with a new passion.

"Do you never think of us? You are crucifying my pride. What a terrible thing it is to be such an egoist! Yes, I realised to-day that our love has come to the crossways. It is no use pretending any more. Don't you understand?"

He was still the victim of his own self-pity.

"No one has any moral courage——"

"How can you say that?"

"I thought you would stand by me."

"So I might—to the death. But must we bear everything with a kind of servile, doting pity?"

She had struck home, and he staggered.

"Good God, is that it?"

"Think!"

"So the best thing I can do is to shoot myself. In fact, you suggest that I ought to have done it weeks ago."

She put her hands to her face.

"Oh, my dear, what blindness! And I love you——"

Her soft, choking voice was like a cry in the darkness, and for a moment Pierce Hammersley stood very still. Then he began to tremble like a man who has struck out wildly in a moment of madness and found blood on his hands.

"Janet!"

"You are crucifying my love!"

He fell on his knees and hid his face against her dress.

"Janet, what is it? Help me!"

She bent over him with a passion of tenderness, her arms about his neck.

"Oh, I want to be proud of you, and I can't—I can't!"

A man is a god when he is made to feel things deeply, when some very human cry rings utterly real and true. The preacher may preach solemnly against sin and leave people thinking of their dinners, whereas a man may be saved by the tears of the girl he has wronged. So it was that Pierce Hammersley was shocked into strange awe of Janet, for her anguish mastered him. Something very great and wonderful and tragic seemed to be bending over him in the darkness, a pride that was bleeding, a compassion that wept strange tears. For she was no weakling, no silly, doting girl. And he discovered a sudden amazement that she should care so fiercely, that her pride in him should be so desperately dear.

In that moment the beginning of his salvation came to him, for his pride and perversity melted like brass in the white blaze of a new humility.

"I have been a selfish beast!" he said.

She could not contradict him; but contradiction was not the thing he needed.

"I'm proud and I understand. But one

ought not to have to be proud with these Scarshott people; it's like having to apologise to a lot of schoolchildren for one's clothes."

She gave a little shiver of excitement.

"How cold it is!"

"Good heavens, what a self-absorbed fool! And you aren't wearing those furs I bought you. I must take you home."

She did not repel him now, for he was a changed man, shaken out of his obstinacy and ready to stretch out a hand towards her with a new diffidence. His vanity had deserted him abruptly. He no longer accepted her love as an inheritance that need not be fought for.

Mrs. Yorke was still in bed under her doctor's orders, and they had the little sitting-room to themselves, and with it the darkness and the glow of the fire. Janet sat on a cushion in front of the hearth, with her man's head in her lap and her face shining above him with a triumphant radiance.

They talked—or, rather, Pierce talked, and she prompted him. He was like a man who had had a bad smash in the hunting-field and wanted to work out how it had happened. He seemed to revel in his new humility. It allowed him to be utterly and humanly natural; it seemed to justify him in surrendering to her. He had the inward glow of the man who has been saved.

"That's how it strikes me, Janet. I didn't realise the bigness of the business; I was just a civilian pretending to be a soldier for a year or so. England hadn't grasped the grim reality. She is grasping it now. What do you think was wrong with me, dear girl?"

She held his face between her hands.

"We were growing too selfish. It is not easy for a fat and self-satisfied country like ours to get down on its knees and strip itself for the great sacrifice. Because this war is big—it is noble; it convinces me. Aren't we fighting organised brutality?"

His eyes flashed up to her.

"Good lord, yes! These German swine claim the right to blow our women—you—to bits because war justifies them in behaving like swine! We have got to stuff their own food down their throats—as medicine! You know what was wrong with me?"

"You hadn't learnt to give up everything, dear—to make the great plunge. Christ was right—I'm not preaching—one has to give up in order to get."

"Go on; tell me more."

She bent over him, and her voice died to a whisper; but Pierce's face began to burn with a kind of inspired radiance. He twisted round suddenly, got on his knees, gathered her hands and kissed them.

"You are right—utterly right! What a

touchy, arrogant fool I have been! I'll take my orders from you, dear heart!"

"Oh, now I'm beginning to be proud! Dear man, I'd love you to be just a plain soldier—just a crusader. You'd carry such a cross of glory over your heart!"

"Janet!"

"Give yourself—come back splendidly. I should be so proud of you!"

He knelt up with shining eyes.

"By God, you are right! I believe I could deserve your pride. I'll try!"

Now, this emotional experience, which most men would have called "heroic rot," sent Pierce Hammersley out into the night a changed man. The greater part of life is make-believe; eating and begetting come naturally enough, but all the more artificial fripperies which we call "sentiment" depend upon the interplay of the various vanities that civilisation has developed in us. We have to be shown ourselves in mirrors posed in some fine attitude, covered with imaginary "decorations"; and so subtle does the game become that we end by forgetting that all our make-believe is not real.

Thus Pierce Hammersley went high-stepping back to Orchards, full of the heroisms and self-renunciation poured into him by the suggestive love of a woman.

He found old Porteous dozing in front of a big fire. Pierce tried to be casual, an English cult that has puzzled foreigners.

"I want your opinion, pater."

Porteous rescued his pince-nez from the depths of his chair and got up.

"What is it?"

"I think of starting over again. Janet put it into my head. I'm going to enlist."

"My dear boy!"

And Porteous Hammersley did a most un-English thing. He caught his son by the shoulders and kissed him.

At six o'clock the bugles blew *réveillé*, and the wooden huts filled with the grumbling awakenings of many men. The whole training-camp seemed to hail the grisly dusk of a winter morning with coughings, sneezings, imprecations and unnecessary throwing about of boots. Each man abandoned the forty-square-foot floor space allotted to him and tumbled out on to the muddy parade ground for an hour's drill. Then came breakfast—slabs of bread-and-margarine, bacon and stewed tea. The hard business of the day followed, and since the English climate has no sympathy with soldiers in training, unlimited mud and wet khaki gave the habitual grouchers something solid to grumble about. The Y.M.C.A. hut made the winter evenings bearable. The men were in bed early, and it is astonishing how quickly a man learns to sleep wrapped up in blankets and lying on plain, honest boards. The whole camp snored.

Pierce Hammersley went good-temperedly through experiences that would have made him rage a year ago. He had his bad times, such as when a sergeant-instructor made a dead set at him during physical drill, and Hammersley had to bear the man's insolence without the flicker of an eyelid. Then his next-door neighbour came in drunk. There were occasions, too, when Hammersley had to fight his food and smother a furious feeling of nausea. But he was still a little exalted spiritually, and Janet's letters helped to keep him so.

"It's good for me. After all, it's the real thing, and I was altogether too soft and selfish."

No one seemed to bother about his past, or even to suspect him of having served before, for he played the game and dissembled his knowledge; and being determined to be a good fellow, and to find his comrades good fellows, he was surprised at his own success. As a matter of fact, he was rather lucky, having been grouped with a very cheery, clean-living crowd. He discovered a real, human zest in the fun and the good fellowship and the philosophic cheerfulness. He made friends; one of them had been a forester, another a ship's cook, the third a cabinet maker. These friendships were a revelation to him; he had never met more kindly, warm-hearted beggars. The spirit of camaraderie was splendid. It never occurred to Hammersley to put on side.

And so he found himself popular, even though he was generous with his money.

"Hammersley's all right. Rare good chap. Quite the gent at home, I bet. There ain't no flies on him, either."

And Hammersley was quite happy. He had a well-filled, warm feeling inside of him; he was not afraid of meeting men's eyes. He was known as "Old Perce," which was the hall-mark of affection. Physically he had never been so fit before, and he was one of the smartest-looking soldiers on parade.

His letters to Janet and his father were merry and quizzical. The letters he received from them gave him a glow at the heart. They were happy about him, proud of him. After all, courage and honour and unselfishness were the things that mattered.

The weeks went by, till the spring came and found him a "trained" man, ready for a draft. He dreaded going to the front much less than he had expected, simply because he had given up counting on the future.

"There is no future," he said, "until we have finished with the Germans. That's how I look at it."

He had not been home since his enlistment, and Scarshott had been able to indulge in nothing but unflattering con-

tures. He had "bolted"—gone to "Spain or America"—and Scarshott was surprised and a little disgusted to see him turn up in khaki, for Scarshott was not a very generous town.

Pierce came on his "last leave" before going out with a draft. Janet met him at the station, and he did a thing which the original Pierce Hammersley would never have done—that is to say, he showed no shame in putting his arms round her and kissing her as a woman should be kissed.

Janet was red, abashed, and he laughed.

"Sorry, dear, if that was a bit too obvious. But you really look so—adorable! I've been living with simple, unselfconscious people. They do what they want to do and don't worry."

"I think I liked it, lad. And you have grown better looking."

"Oh, come now!"

She was right. This was a man with steadier eyes and a new calmness. His whole face looked kinder, less irritable. She knew in a moment that she had the woman's dearest right—the right to be proud of him. He was making good.

What need to bother about Scarshott? Old Porteous had grown sleek again; even Mrs. Sophia chose to be just to her son. They were happy, sad hours, touched with the green of the spring and tremulous with the singing of birds.

They said good-bye in the pine woods.

"No, I won't come to the station, dear man."

"That's wise."

There was a wondering look in her eyes, as though she were trying to read his fate.

"What are you thinking about, Janet?"

She stood close to him.

"It's so much—so much finer than last time. But I was wondering—"

"What?"

"Oh, my dear, it's hard—though I'm proud you're going. Supposing—"

He just held her in his arms, so firmly that she could hardly breathe; but it was the clasp of the strong man and not of the temperamental intellectual.

"I'm coming back. But I'm not going to think about it. I know you are with me, dear. And I want to get something—to please you."

"Dear!"

A month later Pierce Hammersley and fifty other men joined the 23rd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, the battalion being in billets for a month after a tough time in the trenches. From the very first he discovered a very different spirit in France from that which had dominated the Dardanelles. There was hope here, faith, cheeriness, a kind of grim optimism, an efficiency that was refreshing. Even the

officers seemed to be men of a different temper. That is to say, Pierce Hammersley's luck remained good.

The second-lieutenant who commanded his platoon was known as the "Boy." Never was there a more paternal or a keener youngster. It was almost absurd to see this grave, grey-eyed child fathering his men, examining their feet and seeing that they darned their socks properly. He was adored because he loved his platoon, and not a man among them but was keen for fear of disappointing the Boy.

Captain Guest, who commanded D Company—Pierce's company—was typical of all that was best in the New Army. An old public schoolboy and a Cambridge man, he was the Courteous Knight of the Cheerful Countenance; a quiet man, with shrewd, smiling eyes, something of a dandy, calmly efficient. He stood no nonsense, set a high standard, never spared himself. D Company would have followed him to hell.

With such officers anything is possible. The other companies were equally well led. The colonel was an old Indian officer, clean and hard and kindly. When he gave a junior a dangerous job, that junior was envied. The youngsters competed for such an honour; there was no grousing, no shirking.

Hammersley had been with the battalion less than a week when Captain Guest sent for him. The captain was sitting on a camp bed in a room in a French cottage, smoking, and reading *Punch*. Hammersley, standing at attention, was left alone with Guest.

"Hammersley."

"Sir."

"You have served before, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I happened to know. I think you have done just the right thing. Lieutenant Brydon has reported to me that you are keen and smart."

Hammersley flushed.

"I have had my lesson, sir. I'm out to make good."

Captain Guest's blue eyes smiled at him.

"That's it. I wanted to tell you that I'm your friend; I'll help you in any way I can. There's no need for me to talk shop to you. That's all."

Hammersley saluted.

"I shall follow you, sir, all right. Thank you very much."

So that when D Company boasted about its captain a kind of glow came into Hammersley's eyes. The love of man for man is a very fine and subtle thing, begetting strange heroisms and rare self-sacrifice.

Then came the 23rd's turn in the trenches, and Hammersley went into them like a man dying to wipe off an insult. He found himself made of different stuff from the restive

egoist who had been broken by Colonel Barnack's caddishness. A fine sense of comradeship made the life so different; he kept a smile in his eyes and pride in his heart.

As for his letters home, they made Janet and old Porteous very happy. He was lover, soldier and gentleman, and Janet knew that the only thing she feared was death.

Then came the Great Push, in the full, ripe greenness of the year, when the young armies of England stormed eastwards on the great adventure.

Pierce never forgot that hour of waiting in the trench, but most vividly he remembered Captain Guest passing up and down with a face that seemed to shine as though a white light blazed behind it. And these two men looked into each other's eyes for a moment. Pierce Hammersley felt exalted.

Ask any man to give you a connected account of all that happened on such a day, and he would look at you with scornful, wondering eyes. Everything happens. Imagine an earthquake, a dust storm and two or three thunderstorms all going on at once, with men getting killed and killing, losing each other, falling into shell-holes, cursing, swearing, seeing sights that are indescribable. All that Pierce Hammersley could have told you was that they went forward again into a hell of machine-gun and shell-fire, got mixed up in a sort of wilderness of death and destruction, blundered against more Germans, killed them, got still more mixed up. The battalion seemed to have melted away; and there was a moment when Pierce found himself utterly alone, staring at a dead German who had had his head blown off.

Then a shell burst near him. He dodged and fell into a shell-crater, and in the crater he found the corporal.

The corporal was a Cockney, and the wit of the platoon. He had a smashed leg, and he was swearing at it.

"'Allo, old cock! Come in out of the rain!"

He recognised Pierce.

"What 'e, old Perce! Got it bad somewhere?"

Hammersley explained that he had not been hit, and that his sudden disorderly descent into the crater had been made in error. He proceeded to extract his first field-dressing and to dress the corporal's leg.

"Blimy, you've 'ad a bash on yer tin 'at!"

"I remember something making a row."

The corporal called the heavens to witness.

"'E remembers somethin' makin' a sort of row! That tin 'at should 'ave been yer 'christenin' mug, my bloke. Gawd, I was forgettin'! That buzzer knocked me silly!"

"What were you forgetting? Just hold on a moment."

But the corporal tapped Pierce on the shoulder and stared into his face.

"The capt'n's out there."

"Captain Guest?"

"What hother? 'Just you stay 'ere, Palk,' 'e says to me. 'I'm going hon. I can see one or two of the boys lying out over there.' And on 'e went. Then a bloomin' machine-gun started spittin' just ahead there. You can 'ear the blighter at it now. And I 'ave a sort of feelin', bloke, that the capt'n's lyin' out there."

Pierce said very quietly:

"I'll go and see."

He went. And in going he discovered the spontaneity of certain kinds of courage and the way a man behaves when his heart is concerned. That particular machine-gun was firing from somewhere in a spiteful and panicky sort of fashion; but Pierce was not thinking of machine-guns—he was thinking of finding Guest.

He came upon him quite suddenly, lying in a shallow hollow, his chin resting on his crossed arms. He raised his head slightly when he saw Hammersley, and a queer look came into his eyes.

"What the devil are you doing here, Hammersley?"

"I heard you were out here, sir."

"Well, go back! Can't you hear that machine-gun at it?"

"There's a goodish crater fifty yards back, sir."

"Well, get back to it, man! My right thigh is smashed—"

Hammersley disobeyed orders.

"Look here, sir, I came out to bring you in. You are going to let me get you into the shell-crater or I shall stay here."

Guest looked at him intently.

"All right. Somehow I think you mean it."

Hammersley crawled close to the captain, and making use of his rifle and his puttees, he splinted the broken thigh. Then he strapped Guest's feet together.

"The best way would be for me to drag you."

"I can crawl now. It was that leg wobbling about that bothered me."

"Sure?"

"Lead on!"

They got back safely to the shell-crater, where Corporal Palk made an absurd and exultant sort of noise in his throat.

"Well, if this ain't a bit of all right, sir! Good man, old Perce!"

But the adventure seemed to have whetted Hammersley's appetite. The German machine-gun was hiccupping as though its innards were out of order, and but for an occasional shell the neighbourhood was comparatively peaceful.

Hammersley slunk out and about, and developed an extraordinary business capacity.

He collected three more wounded men, several water-bottles, a box of bombs and a supply of emergency rations.

Corporal Palk grew ecstatic.

"Blimy, sir, if this 'ere 'ole don't begin to look like 'ome!"

They settled down to wait for the dusk or the coming of some of their own men. Hammersley offered to try and make his way back and send up stretcher-bearers, but Captain Guest seemed keener for him to stay.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather you stuck here, Hammersley."

It was said in an undertone, and Pierce stayed.

The luck had been with him that day, and his luck still held, even when Corporal Palk poked his nose over the edge of the crater and sighted that German patrol.

"Lumme! Boches!"

The patrol was about a hundred yards away, and advancing in the direction of the crater. There were about twenty Germans, and they seemed to be searching the ground. The machine-gun had stopped firing.

"Ell!" Corporal Palk's eyes glared in a grey face. "Bay'netin' our wounded! Saw two of them jabbin' at a chap over there! 'Ere, gimme a rifle!"

But Hammersley had gone to the box of bombs; he was an expert bomber.

Captain Guest's voice rapped out.

"Put your head down, Palk, and leave that rifle alone!"

He glanced at Hammersley and smiled grimly.

"Will you take it on? Let 'em come fairly close, and then surprise them. How many were there, Palk?"

"'Bout twenty, sir."

"We must see what we can do to back Hammersley up."

The Boches came on towards the crater, and Pierce watched them from behind a twisted knot of grass. They were on the alert, but did not seem to expect immediate trouble ahead of them; in fact, they bunched together when they were about twenty yards from the pit, and Pierce saw his chance.

He withdrew the catch, waited a second, stood up and threw the bomb. He was out of the crater and ready with another before the first had exploded. But the first pitched beautifully and made a mess of certain of the Boches; the second was a trifle short. Before Pierce could throw his third several of the Germans were retaliating.

He had scrambled clear of the crater so as to draw the German fire from it, and in such a fight quick wits and quick feet serve. The Boches had scattered, and were using both bomb and rifle. Luckily they

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were flurried and very angry, and the irrepressible Palk was cracking away at them like mad.

Then Pierce fell over a shell-hole; but the fall saved him. A bomb burst within a yard, and one of his feet was put out of action for ever. He remembered hearing Palk cheering.

"What-o, the boys! 'I! 'I! This way for the Clapham bus! Yew, they've got a Lewis gun! Oh, Gawd!"

The remnant of the German patrol bolted and fled as a wave of brown figures hunted them homewards with the bayonet.

An extraordinary sense of contentment possessed Pierce Hammersley as they carried him back to the nearest dressing-station. His foot felt like so much red-hot iron, but somehow the pain did not seem to matter. He knew that he had done well; he had recovered his self-respect; he had saved Guest's life. And he was out of this hell for a while, with a very fine chance of seeing the folk at home.

At the dressing-station he found himself lying next to Captain Guest. The stretchers were almost touching, and Guest's eyes welcomed him.

"I hope you're not badly smashed, old man."

Pierce flushed up like a girl.

"Only my foot."

"Shake hands."

They shook hands—proudly.

"You ought to be pleased with yourself, Hammersley."

"Ought I?"

"Yes; and I'm not going to keep quiet about it. You ought to get the Cross."

Pierce Hammersley was sent to a base hospital, where his foot had to be amputated above the ankle. But a wound is good news at home when death has been cheated, and Pierce wrote home very cheerfully.

"You can look the world in the face," he wrote to Janet. "I think I can respect myself, dear, and so I'm happy. My one desire is to see you. Surely life is very good!"

A day or two later Porteous Hammersley received a letter that sent him walking through Scarshott with immense and radiant complacency. It came from Captain Guest, who had taken the trouble to discover Hammersley's home address.

"I should like you to know," he said, "that I owe my life to your son's courage, and that four other men are in the same debt. He behaved most splendidly, bringing in wounded under fire, and to save us he attacked a party of Germans single-handed. I hope he will be with you soon, and I'm proud to have known him."

Porteous wanted to publish that letter in

the Scarshott paper, but Janet shook her head.

"I think he would rather you didn't, father. It would look as though we cared about what these people thought. It only matters to you and to me—I think Pierce is content with that."

Late in July Pierce Hammersley crossed the Channel in a hospital ship, and was sent to a hospital in one of the southern counties. The operation scar had healed, and in a day or two they let him get about on crutches. And life seemed very good to him, for he was in England once more, and love was near.

As for the hospital, it lived in a country house, and you could hear the reaping-machines at work and smell the hay. There was an old garden about it, a park full of goodly trees, and beyond the park a glint of yellowing cornfields amid the deep green of the woods.

Scarshott was eighty miles away, but a letter brought the Hammersley's big car speeding along the summer roads. Mrs. Sophia was away from home, and in his heart of hearts Porteous Hammersley did not regret her absence, for on this almost sacred day he had a girl with wonderful, proud eyes beside him. And in watching her Porteous Hammersley marvelled that he had ever been a snob. The war was giving life its truer values; there was more winning of things, less buying of them.

He was an unselfish old boy, and as the car turned into the private road to Poyntz Hall he prepared to efface himself for the first half-hour.

"I shall stay in the car, Janet."

"But why?"

He smiled at her.

"Not all the time, you know. Don't argue, my dear. If I choose to be romantic——"

"I absolutely refuse!"

"Well, it will look rather ridiculous if we both insist on sitting here. Age is supposed to be privileged."

"You are a dear!" she said.

At Poyntz Hall the commandant had to be interviewed; a large woman in a red linen dress who looked stupid—and wasn't.

"Private Hammersley? Oh, yes; he will be out in the garden. It isn't the regular visiting-hour."

Janet smiled at her disarmingly.

"I haven't seen him since he was wounded; and his father and I have driven eighty miles."

"Have you? I will send a boy scout for your brother, Miss Hammersley."

Janet's face betrayed her.

"Oh, I see. How stupid of me! He will be out in the garden. If you would like to see the rose garden, I will send a scout to find—Private Hammersley."

"Thank you so much."

The rose garden was a fairly solitary place, and when Pierce entered it, tapping the flagged walk with his crutches, he could at first see nothing but masses of rambler roses smothering arches and pillars and running along ropes like flame. An old yew hedge surrounded the rose garden, and this green wall had recesses cut in it for seats.

"Janet!"

He called her as though the garden belonged to him and there were no other men in blue uniform within a mile. She came out of her hiding-place with the sun in her eyes, and they met in a tunnel of roses, with no one to play the spy.

"My dear girl! My dear girl!"

He was absurdly moved, and he kept on saying the same thing over and over again. Moreover, he was not very steady on his crutches, and she had to steady him with her hands upon his shoulders.

"You have lost your foot!"

"Why, so I have!"

"But, Pierce, you never told us."

"Didn't I? Well, what does it matter? They rig you up so prettily now. Good God, is it really you?"

"Really me."

"Let's go and sit down. Are you all alone?"

"Father's waiting in the car. What a dear he is! He insisted—"

"Dear old pater! I say, I think I shall have to hobble along on my own, pet. I shall tread on your toes with these things."

He laughed—happy, buoyant laughter—while she hovered near him, watching, ready to help him when he needed her. There was an oak seat in one of the recesses cut in the yew hedge. She took his crutches, and helped to lower him with an arm about his body.

"You never told me half of what happened, but someone else wrote."

"Who?"

"Captain Guest."

"Did he? I could have died for that chap! Our officers were splendid!"

"And so were you!"

He looked at her half shyly.

"I think I did all right. And the funny thing was, I didn't feel afraid. I had your picture and your letters in my pocket."

"Dear man!"

She took his face between her hands and kissed him impulsively.

"I'm so proud of you! I never thought one could be so happy. There—I really must go and fetch your father."

"By George, yes! Dear old pater!"

She fled away, and returning with Porteous Hammersley, almost thrust him into the rose garden and left the two men together.

Scarshott town did not appear to realise what had happened. Like many other towns, it had no social imagination, no intimate understanding of the horrors and heroisms, the pathetic moral victories of this great war. It had heard that Pierce Hammersley had been wounded, but it attached no fine significance to the news. Men were being killed and wounded every minute; the thing had become a commonplace.

Therefore Scarshott was rather inclined to smile over Porteous's gallant self-satisfaction.

Some of the lesser bodies were facetious.

"The old boy's mighty pleased with life."

"Suppose he thinks young Pierce has turned himself into a hero."

"After all, what's a wound? You get it whether you like it or not."

So Scarshott refused to be impressed, and even adopted a cynical attitude.

Every few days the big car carried Janet or Pierce's father to Poyntz Hall. Then Mrs. Sophia chose to feel that she could be reconciled to her son, and Pierce most patiently listened to his mother's amazing platitudes. She had not changed in the least; nothing would ever change her, for the simple reason that she never doubted that the thing she did was the only right and proper thing.

Then Pierce received an extraordinary piece of news. It was so dramatic that it almost amazed him. The thing was too much like a picture-palace vulgarity, "featuring" So-and-So and So-and-So in some sentimental abomination.

Still, he had seen the grim reality, and that saved him. He knew how all these little strips of ribbon had been won.

He wrote to his father. Somehow it seemed to him right and good that the old man should get the news, for there is such pride in the telling.

That letter caught Porteous Hammersley as he was getting up from the breakfast-table. It so excited him that even the regular habits of the last twenty years failed to save him from making "an exhibition of himself," as Scarshott would have put it. His one idea was that Janet ought to hear the news. Did not Pierce ask him to tell her? Good boy—dear boy! Porteous never thought of rushing upstairs to tell his wife.

His enthusiasm was such that he forgot his hat, and the people who lived along the London road had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Porteous Hammersley striding at a great rate towards the common. He had remembered his walking-stick, if he had forgotten his hat.

Porteous Hammersley found Janet in the garden, tying up the new wood of a rambler

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rose. He had to rid himself of the great news even before he had opened the gate.

"Pierce has won the Cross!"

She looked at him with wide, bright eyes.

"The V.C.?"

"Yes! What will Scarshott think of that?"

She went and kissed him.

"How splendid!"

"It's you who did it, Janet! Oh, yes, I know all about it!"

He was immensely excited.

"Where's your mother, dear?"

"She has just finished breakfast."

"I want to congratulate her. We ought to have a dinner or something. What?"

He had to be taken into the diminutive drawing-room, and in the passage he put up his hand to remove his hat.

"Bless me! Did I leave it in the garden?"

"What is it?"

"My hat."

Janet could have hugged him.

"My dear, you hadn't a hat!"

He stared.

"Bless my soul!"

And then he fell a-laughing.

"I think I'm a little bit excited, child!"

He was.

From Poyntz Hall, Private Pierce Hammersley went to London for a certain great event. He was one of a dozen men who received that much-coveted decoration.

Porteous had taken rooms at the Piedmont. They had a little dinner that night—Janet, Porteous, Pierce and Captain Guest. Mrs. Sophia was in bed with a cold, a disaster that no one regretted.

Most of the talking was between Hammersley and his captain.

"It's all luck, you know."

"That's pure pose."

Pierce looked at Guest with eyes of affection.

"You ought to have had it. You led us."

"Nonsense!"

"I know better. Did we follow you well?"

"I could have wept for joy!"

A band was playing, and somehow they did not want that band. Porteous had taken a private sitting-room, and they retreated to it for coffee and cigars.

And here a great debate arose, a debate in which Pierce began by being truculent and ended in smiling resignation.

Said Guest:

"I suppose you will have a sort of triumphal reception where you live."

Pierce showed instant restiveness.

"Not on any account——"

"But, my dear chap, people will do these things."

"They don't love me well enough down

there. Besides, I wouldn't stand it if they tried the brass-band trick on me. I should be thinking of the Boy and you—and all the fine chaps who are lying out there."

Guest appealed to Janet. He had noticed that she was watching Pierce's father, and that Porteous was showing signs of distress.

"What do you say, Miss Yorke?"

She seemed to think for a moment, and then she looked straight at Pierce.

"I think there are times when a man becomes public property for a day or so. Besides, if it pleases other people——"

Her eyes held Pierce's, and then glanced meaningfully at Porteous. That look of hers was an appeal and a challenge. For Hammersley's father had grown silent; he seemed intent on his cigar, but he was unhappy about something, and he showed it.

Pierce saw and understood. His eyes swept back to meet Janet's, and with an honouring look thanked her.

"Perhaps you are right. If it does happen I'll try to smile and look pretty. And probably I shall end by liking it."

After Guest had gone Pierce had a few moments alone with Janet. She went to him impulsively, holding out her hands.

"How much kinder you are! You see, he had confided in me."

"Poor old pater!"

"He would have been so hurt, so humiliated. It seems that the tannery people sent a deputation. Your father was delighted. They want to drag the carriage up from the station."

"Oh, lord! But, really, it's very decent of them. Of course, it's the pater's triumph; he has always treated them very well."

"Do you know that you are being placarded down there as 'The Scarshott V.C.'?"

"Much obliged, I'm sure! Provincial towns are extraordinary places. I'll go through with it, Janet."

"I'm glad!"

The day of Pierce Hammersley's homecoming was his father's day. Quite a big crowd was waiting at the station to meet the train. People threw flowers into the carriage, and the cheering was perfectly sincere.

Old Porteous was very dignified and very happy. He got up to make a speech when the crowd followed the carriage into the Orchards' garden. It was a very short speech, but the most effective part of it was the breakdown towards the end.

Pierce had to struggle up and cover the old man's emotion.

"Thank you all—thank you most heartily! I hope I shall be the man my father is."

They cheered him unreservedly.

But the pride in Janet's moist eyes was the light that crowned his valour.

TRELAWNEY'S Z RAYS.

(Copyright.)

By WARWICK DEEFING,

Author of "No. 1063 Company," "The
Professor's Secret," "Sharks,"
&c., &c.

We Knights of the Imperial Secret
Council were still seated round the
library table at Stars Court when Cur-
zon's "raid" came in with a telegram.
Curzon opened it.

"Read that telegram, Falconer, and
tell me what you make of it. Read it
aloud."

"Fairly reckless—this! 'Send a re-
sponsible man here. Trelawney, Rother-
ham.'"

"To wire us like that with every other
telegraph clerk in the country a spy for
the Committee of Public Safety," said
Hamilton.

"What'll go," he asked, "you, Fal-
coner? You know the south."

"What's better—I know Rotherham. I
can swim there in an hour."

I rose and left them. A June sun
shone. My "Phoebus" monoplane was
in the meadow by the fishponds. We had
changed the older, cruder ways, with
mechanics clinging to the machine, while
the propeller whirled up wind power. My
flying coat lay on one of the stays, and
my petrol tanks were full. The "Phoe-
bus" was a self-starter. I slipped into
my coat, climbed into the seat, opened
the district map before me, and put the
starting pedal down. The engine, with
its new Auster valves and silencers raced
to a soft, droning purr. I was up and
away, heading south-east over the Surrey
hills.

In fifty minutes I caught a glimpse of
Rotherham, that black-towered Sussex
castle set in the midst of its broad
moat.

A broad meadow lay north of the castle
with a row of aspen trees next the moat.
No better landing place could have offered.
I shut off my engine and planed down.
The "Phoebus" touched the ground like
a leaf.

I was climbing out of the seat when
some one called my by name.

"Colonel Falconer—"

A woman came out from the shade of
the aspen trees. She was tall, with a
broad head, firm mouth, and dark, ad-

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the aspen trees. ~~There was~~ proud head, firm mouth, and dark, adventurous eyes.

"Lady Joan?"

"I saw your monoplane ten minutes ago."

"It has taken me an hour from Stars Court. But how did you hit upon my name?"

"I have seen you before."

We crossed the meadow towards the moat, where a wooden bridge led to the great gate.

"Is there much news?" she asked.

"There will be war in a month. We are ready."

We passed through the great gateway and the main court. Lady Joan Trelawney led the way up a broad flight of stairs.

Trelawney came to meet me.

"Falconer? This is excellent."

"That telegram to us was rash."

"Perhaps it was rash. But knowing what I know it is hard for me to truckle to caution. Power. Falconer, power! Do these demagogues think that all government—civilisation—is a matter of making speeches! They may have talked the country mad for the moment."

"There will be a war in a month," I said, "and it will not be like the butchery on the Hog's back, when our people were blown to pieces by the guns."

"Guns! Let them have all the guns in Europe, Falconer. The 'aristocrats of labour' are destined to rule."

He took me down into the courtyard, turned up a loose stone that was imbedded in grass, touched something, and the crumbling base of a great buttress opened like a huge lid. A flight of stairs showed. Trelawney led the way.

"These old cellars made a fine secret laboratory," he said.

He touched a switch, and the whole cavern of a place was lit.

This laboratory of Trelawney's was very wonderfully fitted. Ranged along one wall were things that looked like big ~~cases~~, save that the face of each was shaped like a flattened tunnel, and closed by some kind of metal shutter. Trelawney held out his left hand.

"Do you notice anything?"

"You have lost a little finger."

"It was fortunate for me that it was nothing more. The child playing with strange new forces."

...the same playing with strange new forces."

He went to a hutch, brought out a live rabbit, and fastened the animal in a species of wicker cradle on a long bench. Then he set a greyish metal shield behind the rabbit, and going to a safe built into the wall, opened it, and took out what I thought was a silver pencil-case.

"Watch."

He walked to the far end of the laboratory and beckoned me to stand well on one side. I saw him stretch out a hand. There was the faint click of a spring.

"Go and look at bunny, Falconer."

I went. The rabbit was dead.

"Neater than crude explosives, Falconer?"

"What does it mean?"

"It means that in my experiments here I discovered a substance that is as wonderful as and far more terrible than radium. You know something of radium."

"This substance of mine gives off the most extraordinary rays, Z rays, I call them, I was experimenting in hundredth of a grain, and I lost a little finger."

"And these rays kill?"

"Kill! I calculate that they will kill at almost any distance, and pass through brick, stone, earth, anything—save my amalgam."

I stared at the row of metallic objects that looked like great headlights.

"You mean that those things set on Hampstead Heath could wipe out London?"

"Certainly."

"But they exhaust themselves?"

"I told you the stuff has some resemblance to radium. The one is an almost everlasting throwing-off of minute particles, the other a constant streaming out of this force I call Z rays. You have only to place your tripod, sight your machine, and open the shutter. Death streams out."

"This is devilish!"

"I am no savage. One battle would be enough. As for war—it will be impossible."

It was dusk when we left the laboratory.

"You must stay the night, Falconer."

"I want to hear more about these rays."

We dined in the great hall that had been restored. An elderly man-servant waited. I judged him to be an old

waited. I judged him to be an old soldier by a long scar on the right cheek and forehead.

"The Soudan," said Trelawney, "that is where Hardy got that slash. I keep only two men here. They are trustworthy."

Lady Joan left us alone to smoke, and Trelawney and I discussed the immediate future. Being a practical man, I wanted the thing tested in the field.

"Very well," he said, "you can carry a passenger in your aeroplane. Is she reliable?"

"Ten years ago—I would not have taken you and one of your Z-ray lanterns up for love or money."

"Say we fly to Purley. I believe they are training some of the Red Legions on the Downs there. I can try the rays on some squad or other. They you will see."

Trelawney rose and led the way up an oak staircase to the music room.

When the evening came to an end Trelawney himself took me down a long gallery to a room in the eastern tower.

"I have told my men to put out everything you may want. In the morning we can make our plans."

When he had left me I opened the lattice window, undressed, climbed into bed, and fell asleep.

I awoke with instant alertness. I had heard a revolver shot. The next moment I was out of bed, and fumbling for the switch. There had been a rush of feet up the main stairway, the sound of blows. I scrambled into coat and trousers, took my automatic pistol, and dashed out into the gallery.

All the lights were turned on. At the head of the great staircase I saw a man lying with arms spread out. It was the man Hardy.

Voices came from the music room. Coming to the open door, I found myself covered by two Browning pistols.

"Good evening, Colonel Falconer; we were expecting you, sir. Step inside, and drop that little shooting iron."

That rash telegram of Trelawney's! In the centre of the room stood Patrick O'Hara, the red butcher of Communism, and the head of the Peoples' Committee of Public Safety.

Trelawney, the aristocrat, stood by the lamp in the window recess. Lady Joan still sat at the piano. There were five

and sat at the piano. There were five other men in the room beside O'Hara.

While one fellow covered me with his pistol another took my Browning from me.

"Now, gentlemen," said O'Hara, "some one clicked a message to us. The Committee of Public Safety were interested. I ran down to give you a friendly surprise." Turning to Miss Trelawney, he said:

"I'll give you a chance to say you've kissed Patricia O'Hara."

I caught him full on the ear. He reeled over. The next moment I had three men on me. They dragged me towards the door.

O'Hara picked himself up.

Joan Trelawney rose suddenly and caught O'Hara's arm.

"Irishmen are always chivalrous."

"I treat my prisoners—like gentlemen."

She burst out weeping.

"I guess we've frightened you a little. I have frightened strong men in my time."

He glanced meaningly at me.

"Colonel—I think we will put you back to bed for to-night. Mister Trelawney shall show me the sights of the castle. Brewer and Goldstein, march the Colonel back to his room. Camp out by the door."

They marched me off, trying to persuade myself that Trelawney had one of those Z tubes in his pocket, and was letting the Irishman drink up the dregs of his insolence before he dealt him instant death. The two men examined the window of my room. It was a narrow lancet, and the modern lattice had been fitted outside a couple of ancient stanchions. They locked me in, and I could hear them settling themselves outside the door.

Presently the light on my narrow window told me that a moon had risen. I crossed the room, felt for my watch on the dressing-table, and moved towards the window. It was one o'clock.

What the devil was that?

I stood rigid. It was the soft part of the engine of my monoplane that lay in the meadow.

I opened the window and looked out. Beyond the aspen trees a black shape soared into view, rising in a great spiral towards the east. It crossed between me and the white face of the moon. It was

and the white face of the moon. It was my Phoebus monoplane.

The truth flashed on me. Joan Trelawney was flying my great monoplane. O'Hara and his fools had omitted to cut the steering wires, or to empty the petrol tanks, and the girl had managed to escape with the machine. No doubt Rotherham had its secret passages. I understood now the meaning of her hysterical pleading with O'Hara. She had wished to make him think her a mere frightened fool, who could be left unguarded.

Even as I watched, the great black bird up yonder came sweeping back in a half circle from the east, and, heading north-west, passed from my view. Joan Trelawney was flying for Stars Court, sixty miles away among the Surrey hills.

Sitting on the edge of the bed I fell to making rapid calculations. It would take Joan an hour to reach Stars Court. Brent and Summers were there with their monoplanes, and Royce with his great biplane that could carry six men. Provided Joan could rouse her rescue party and get them started within another hour, they could make Rotherham by dawn.

"By George, she's the most splendid thing I ever met!"

The men still snored. I dressed myself, and went and sat in the window seat.

Suddenly I bent forward. A faint humming sound came from somewhere, like the sound of a swarm of bees. It grew louder, thrilling me through and through with its vibrations. I saw a great black shape swoop and glide down beyond the aspen trees. Another followed it, and yet another. The eagles had flown from Stars Court. Would they catch O'Hara and his men asleep?

A shout of warning, a drumming of feet, the click of an electric switch. Instant and echoing came a splatter of pistol shots down the gallery. I heard an oath, and a smothered cry outside my door. Something fell against it, and lay still.

Again—silence. Then a vibrant crackle of shots, the vicious snapping of automatic pistols, a hurrying of feet along the gallery.

It was Brent who threw open the door. He had a red graze along one cheek.

"Falconer! That's Jod—man. What a wipe out!"

"Is Trelawney safe?"

a wipe out!"

"Is Trelawney safe?"

"Yes."

"O'Hara?"

"Lying on his face in a room down yonder, with a bullet through his skull."

"How did you get in?"

"Joan Trelawney brought us in by her own private way."

"Brent—that's a woman!"

"I met Joan Trelawney at the foot of the great stairway."

"My homage to you."

"The flight was worth it. That machine is a clipper."

"I believe you have saved England."

Trelawney turned on us.

"Gentlemen, no time must be lost."

"Falconer, we must get these engines of mercy of ours away to Stars Court. You may have to hurry your plans, but what of that!"

He led us into the laboratory, and explained his discovery to Brent, Summers, and the rest, and it awed them as it had awed me. The Z-ray distributors were taken down, and laced up in cases of black leather. The tripods were lashed into a bundle.

O'Hara and his underlings we sank in the moat. Hardy and the other man servant who had been killed in the porter's lodge we buried in a hastily dug grave at the base of one of the ruined towers. O'Hara's 60 h.p. "Snake" still stood in the meadow where they had left it after the car had crawled up silently from the main road. Brent went out, and starting up the engine, drove the car round to where the grass dipped to the water's edge. He backed the "Snake" up the slope, set the engine racing with the gear lever in the neutral, and climbed out. Seating beside the car he swung the gear lever over towards the top speed notch, hanging on to it while the gears kicked and jarred. Then she raced towards the moat. A splash, and the long grey body disappeared under the water.

In an hour or so we all were gathered in the meadow beyond the aspens. Trelawney had locked the great gate of Rotherham, and by some secret device raised the drawbridge behind him after he had crossed.

Royce's big biplane has a basket-built luggage carrier fixed to the frame, and as Royce had brought only three pas-

sengers with him, and could carry six, he had plenty of spare power for Trelawney and his Z-ray battery.

"Are you sure of your machine?" asked Trelawney. "If anything were to happen, and the distributors were smashed, and these rays let out broadcast—"

"I have never had any trouble with the biplane," replied Royce. "I'll test my engine."

He found it was working perfectly.

Joan Trelawney and I were standing beside my Phoebe. Our eyes met.

"May I carry you as my Winged Victory?"

"I am ready," she said.

"Falconer, you will be our fastest flier," said Trelawney.

"Right. We'll go up and act as scout and pilot. We know the country pretty well."

Joan was acting as scout.

"They are up, and after us," she said.

"Now for Stars Court."

The great monoplane went sweeping westwards.

The Sleeping Beauty

By Warwick Deeping

"That rotten punt! You had been warned that it was not safe. You did nothing. You didn't bother. You didn't care. You care for nothing but your own damned face!"

He walked past her and on, aware of her blank face—a face of astonishment and of vague anger



He wrote in his diary :

"The infernal sameness of your beautiful, expressionless face!

Will anything make you alive?"



He loved her, yet there were times when he hated her, for she seemed to love nothing, not even herself.

Some men are always in conflict, and Arnold Mostyn's life had been one of conflict, a struggle with inanimate things and all the cussedness of inanimate things. At twenty-three he had inherited a derelict estate, mortgaged up to the eyebrows; he had had to sell the old house at Windmill Hill and the Mostyn Dower House, and make his home at the Warren Farm. He married. His wife gave him two children and died. He hardened himself. A passionate and warm-blooded man, he suppressed the passionate part of himself, partly because he could not afford to be passionate, partly for the sake of his children. The War over, he put all that was in him into the running of the estate. At seven-and-thirty he found himself emerging from the struggle, able to stand and look about him, to draw breath, to remember that he was still young, that he wanted a mate, and that his two children needed a mother.

"I'll marry again," he thought; "some pleasant, wholesome girl. A woman whom you can love quietly and comfortably as one loves a landscape. I should want her to be good to Roy and Josephine."

Such had been his plan. And then—she—had appeared. She had bought both Windmill Hill and the Dower House, and had established herself in one and let the other. She was young, and she had money. Moreover, she had beauty, a black and white loveliness, a passionless, sleeping charm. She looked as though she had been born in Grecian days and would never grow old.

Her name was Elizabeth Brabazon, and Mostyn fell in love with her.

It was a tempestuous love, deep and fierce, the love of a man who had gone hungry for years, and whose strength was at its noon. And she—loved nothing. Or rather, she seemed asleep, a baffling creature without emotion, serene, neither happy nor unhappy, moving coldly through life.

"She has never been touched," he thought, "never loved as I can love her."

He called her the Lady of the Cedars, of the High Woods. The old place up yonder was stately, and so was she. His first glimpse of her had been of a tall woman in black, walking to and fro under the great cedars in front of the red-and-grey repose of the house. She seemed above the world, above men. He had never seen another woman like her. He was fire, and she was ice.

"I shall melt her," he said.

He did not know that other men had said the same, and had found themselves frozen. She turned everything to ice.

Mostyn made love to her. She remained the same. He began to be aware of her face as a beautiful and expressionless serenity. Her dark eyes never brightened; they were the same

By Warwick Deeping

when he came and when he went away.

There were times when he wondered whether she was insensitive, stupid. She tantalised him. He tried the effect of his children upon her; they were rather delightful children and quite unspoilt.

She looked at them as though they were two dolls in a shop window. She was pleasant to them in her apathetic, superhuman way. She fed them on the most expensive cakes at tea, and let them run wild in the garden. But she was not interested.

A month later he asked her to marry him.

She did not seem surprised, or touched, or flattered.

"Elizabeth, will you marry me?"

She looked at the horizon, and refused him as though she were refusing cake at a garden party.

"No, I don't think so. Thank you, Mr. Mostyn."

He was baffled, enraged. It was after this refusal of hers that he wrote in his diary:

"I have always been on the edge of life. I have never had a margin until now. I was free at last to let myself go, and I fall in love with a statue!"

But he did not accept this first repulse, and he was surprised to find how easily she met him, as though nothing had happened, as though she were warming her hands at a fire and not at the fire of a man's love. He tried to approach by way of a more subtle appeal: his loneliness, his need of her as a comrade. He failed as utterly as he had failed with his more obvious passion.

"Loneliness? I don't think I know what it is," she said.

That was the damnable part of her; her dispassionate way of approaching everything and discussing it as some abstract quality, or as a recipe out of a cookery book.

"It's like making love to a wax model in a dressmaker's window," he said to himself in exasperation.

He tried sarcasm.

"You are not like the rest of us poor, silly, human things—full of human illusions."

Sarcasm had no more effect on her than tenderness.

"If you mean that I don't get excited——"

"You are marble," he reflected, "a shell of marble. Will nothing break that shell? Is there anything inside it?"

He added another note to his diary:

"I hate you, and yet I want you. I suppose a snow mountain is always provocative to the mountaineer!"

It was not long before Mostyn realised that other men were bewitched by the lady of the Cedars, but that they had not the same fierce obstinacy in loving that he had, for they were easily chilled by her, and with a shrug or a laugh, or a sneer, they kept away.

Mostyn walked home slowly over the darkening fields.

"She's not alive," he reflected, "not as we are. That infernal, arctic beauty of hers! I wonder whether it is because she has never suffered? She has always had perfect health, no pain; life has been all ease, smoothness, comfort. She's a beautiful machine, a self-sufficient machine. Or like the moon!"

A month later that tragic thing happened. Mostyn was down the fields, watching the haymakers at work, when a man came running from the direction of the farm. He was one of Elizabeth Brabazon's gardeners; he was hatless, in his shirt sleeves, and out of breath.

"Mr. Mostyn, sir, come quick!"

"What's the matter? What has happened?"

"It's your little gel, sir. They've got her out, but she's——"

"Good God, man!—what d'you mean?"

"She and Master Roy were playing on the big pool, and the old punt sank with them. She's——"

Mostyn did not wait for more; he ran. He took the lane along the valley, and then cut across the parkland to where the pool lay brimming in the green lap of June. He saw figures, men, something lying on the grass, another man—Gibson, the doctor—getting up heavily off his knees.

The Sleeping Beauty

Another figure rose up out of the grass, the figure of a boy who had been weeping his heart out. He ran blindly to Mostyn.

"Oh, dad, I didn't think. I—tried."

Mostyn took the boy in his arms. He looked at Gibson; and the other men—abashed and silent—looked at each other.

"Any hope, doctor?"

"Mostyn, I'm sorry. We were too late."

Mostyn's face twitched.

"Take the boy, Gibson. Why, he's all wet!"

"I had to pull him out, sir," said one of the men. "Lucky we heard him shouting."

"How did it happen?"

"The old punt, sir. They got playing with it. It ought to have been broken up; it wasn't safe. I told Miss Brabazon so months ago."

Mostyn nodded. He pushed the boy gently towards the doctor, and going to where his daughter lay, knelt down and touched her hair. The men turned away, heavy-eyed; one of them was blubbering behind a brown hand.

Mostyn took the dead child in his arms.

"I'll take her home," he said.

He went alone, for these other men held aloof from his grief—a grief that was grim and voiceless. They understood. They saw him cross the June grassland and disappear under the shadows of the trees.

"It's her fault," said someone.

"I told her."

"She don't care; she takes no notice of what a man says."

By the gate in the old deer-fence Mostyn met her. She had heard the news and was coming towards the pool, and when she saw the man with the dead child in his arms, she paused and stood still. Her eyes looked frightened.

"Is she—?"

"Dead!" he said, and his voice was fierce.

She seemed to shrink, but he had a feeling that she shrank from something which threw a shadow across the cold brightness of her serenity. She shrank, but she did not pity or understand.

"How horrible! You should not have let her come here."

His head went up, nostrils quivering, eyes a-blaze.

"Good God! Is that all? Why, it was your fault."

She stared.

"Oh, no! How could it be?"

"That rotten punt! You had been warned that it was not safe. You did nothing. You didn't bother. You didn't care. You care for nothing but your own damned face."

He walked past her and on, aware of her blank face—a face of astonishment and of vague anger. He hated her, and yet he was conscious of amazement.

"She's a dead woman," he thought, "a dead soul in a live body. Yes, she was afraid—but of what? Death! Afraid for herself, of something which shocked her blind selfishness. Damn her!"

He carried the dead child home.

For weeks they did not meet. She had sent flowers to dead Josephine, but Mostyn had no word from her and he told himself that he desired no message from her, for the dead child lay between them. He could not forget her shrinking from death, her fear of a shadow, a selfish fear that had shocked him.

Yet fate had begun to strike at the statue, to use the steel upon it, or rather—the statue was ceasing to be a thing of stone. The first tremor of life stirred in it.

Mostyn met her next on that August night when Windmill Hill was burnt to a black shell. No one knew how the fire had been started, but half the neighbourhood rushed to stare or to help. It was a still, moonlit night, and Mostyn came on Elizabeth Brabazon standing under one of the cedars, watching the blaze of the burning house. Part of the roof fell in as he paused by her, and a storm of smoke and sparks roared heavenwards. He saw her flinch, start back, as though something had menaced her.

"How did it happen?"

She looked at him vaguely.

"I don't know."

By Warwick Deeping

A fire-engine had come from Kettleworth and another from Merring. They were beginning to pump water on to the building, and the water came from the pool.

"It's too late."

His lips were drawn back over his teeth.

"It drowned my child, and it won't save your house."

Her eyes opened wide and she seemed to flinch as though he had struck her. She did not speak, but her eyes cried, "Need you have said that!" She shivered. And suddenly he was aware of her as a woman, a live thing, a rather bewildered creature who looked at him with reproachful eyes. It was as though she had been asleep and had suddenly awakened to the casual cruelty of things, and to the fear that seizes on a child in the dark.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She did not answer him. She turned and walked away, and he wondered whether it was from pride or pain.

From that moment his inward attitude towards her began to change, though the change was so gradual and so imperceptible that he was hardly aware of it. She had come to some arrangement with her tenants at the Dower House, and she rented the place from them for a year while Windmill Hill was being rebuilt. She seemed very much her old self.

"The old house was rather ugly," she told Mostyn; "my architect will give me something better."

"It was good enough for my people for two-hundred years," he retorted.

There was an air of hostility between them whenever they met. He had a feeling that she was not quite happy, that she had been disturbed in her sleep, and that she resented it, and that he was responsible. Life was compelling her to open her eyes and to use her ears, and she resisted. His fierce words had penetrated the insensitive shell.

In November she went abroad, leaving the builders at work on the new house. In February the work ceased suddenly, and there were rumours in

the neighbourhood—rumours which hardened into cold facts.

"She had half her money in the Imperial Trust. It looks as though she has lost the lot."

Mostyn heard the news, and it roused in him a fierce curiosity. The Imperial Trust affair had been a bad business; it was impossible for him to know how much she had lost in it; but the building of the new house was at a standstill, and that was deeply significant.

In March she returned to England and took up her residence in the Dower House. She had changed. Mostyn was assailed by the obviousness of it on the very first day he met her, and its effect on him was singular. He was aware of a sense of exultation, of fierce, un pitying triumph.

"By God, she's awake at last!" he thought.

She was, yet unexpectedly awake. It was a mixture of fear and of defiance; her eyes had a new restlessness and her face a strange animation. She had learnt to laugh, but her laughter had bitterness in it, a note of rebellious recklessness. And she was handsomer, more tantalising. Her beauty had become alive.

"I suppose you don't wish to repurchase Windmill Hill?" she asked him.

"You are selling?"

"I have lost half my money. My lawyers advise me to sell the place as it stands to someone who will complete it."

She gave him a defiant look.

"After all, it was rather a white elephant. I shall be much freer without it."

Defiance was the dominant note—defiance of something, perhaps she knew not what. The change in her was extraordinary; her passionless apathy became restlessness, her languor a desire for movement and sensation. Yet, always, she gave Mostyn a sense of flight, of looking back half-fearfully over her shoulder at some invisible presence which pursued her. Her eyes saw something sinister and inimical in life.

He had a feeling that she was

The Sleeping Beauty

marked down as a victim, and his attitude became incipiently protective.

She had bought a car and she drove it herself, recklessly and with a passion for speed.

One day she picked up Mostyn's boy, and took him with her. He came back laughing and excited.

"We went to Merring in thirty-five minutes! She does drive, dad!"

Mostyn looked fierce.

"You are not to go with her again. You understand?"

He made Roy promise never to enter her car.

Early in the summer the thing happened. Mostyn had been out riding round one of the outlying farms, and on the way back he met Gibson, the doctor. Gibson waved to him and pulled up.

"They are wanting you at the Warren. Miss Brabazon has had a smash with one of your wagons. They had to shoot one horse."

"Is she hurt?"

The doctor looked grim.

"She'll live—I think," he said; "but the glass screen—she was horribly cut."

"Her face?"

"Yes, her face."

Mostyn rode home at a canter, and helped to soothe and handle a poor, frightened beast with a great wound on one shoulder. Briggs, the vet., was there in the stable, a little man with a kind heart and the pluck of the devil. Mostyn and his groom helped him to deal with the horse, but all the while Mostyn was thinking of a sheet of shattered glass, of a bleeding and disfigured face—her face.

And suddenly, amid the plungings and the shrinkings of the frightened horse, he realised that he loved her as he had never loved her before. He felt that some cruel fate had torn the beauty from her face, and left her broken and bleeding. What did life say to her now? Did she feel? Did she understand?

Twice a day he went down to the Dower House to ask for her. He left flowers, a daily message. He questioned Gibson.

"Will she live?"

The doctor seemed to be concealing something.

"Yes, she will live. There is no reason why she should not be strong and active."

"But she will be disfigured?"

"Yes, disfigured; not grossly so—but her beauty——"

"I understand," said Mostyn, and added to himself: "Why should I be glad?"

He felt that the hard shell of her might be broken, but he did not realise that after the shock of its breaking she might set herself to build another shell, defensively, defiantly, and with bitter pride. She sent him no message in reply to his many messages, and later she refused to see him. He was astonished. He returned to the Warren and wrote to her.

"I ask you to see me. I am not the man I was two years ago, nor—I think—are you the same woman. If you have suffered, so have I."

She answered his letter.

"I thank you for your messages and your flowers, but I will not see you. I am seeing nobody. Please leave me alone."

Mostyn began to understand. He spent half that summer night wandering under the stars, over his fields and through her silent park-land, even to the brim of the pool where his child had been drowned.

"A year ago," he thought, "I wanted the mere beautiful shell of her as a man covets a landscape or a picture. I wanted to possess. Now, it is different. I want the woman in her, the woman who is hurt and defiant and alive and sad."

He wandered under the silent trees.

"If she did not care, she would see me," he reflected; "she is awake and she is afraid."

Mostyn went to the Dower House next morning and refused to be turned away. He sat down on the oak settee in the hall and waited. He had sent up a note by the maid.

"Dear, you must see me, for my sake, as well as for yours."

An answering note was brought down to him.

By Warwick Deeping

"I cannot see you. You hurt me. Please go away."

He went, but that evening he returned, and he returned secretly, for someone who sympathised with them both, had sent him a word of warning. She was going away, flying from the love which pursued her.

"She has life in her heart," he thought, "and she is afraid."

He climbed the wall into her garden, and hid himself among the yew-trees at the end of the rose-garden. It was an ambushade, for he had a feeling that she would come out into the garden when the dusk fell. He could see the paved walk between the roses, the sundial and the stone seat in the centre where the wickurianas hung on chains. He waited, and she came.

She was bareheaded and dressed in black, and when he saw her face, he was both astonished and filled with pity, for to him it seemed that her beauty had suffered so little. She had a puckered scar on her forehead, and a red weal that ran across one cheek—yet to her it had meant so much, a blemished surface, stigmata exaggerated by her hatred of anything that was ugly. But her face was alive; her eyes had lost their shallowness, and had become eloquent with suffering. She sat down on the seat. She had a lost look as though life bewildered her, as though she had nothing but her rather bewildered impulses to guide her. No longer was she self-sufficient, coldly complete in the unblemished calm of her beauty.

Mostyn slipped out noiselessly from among the yews, and he was within three yards of her before she heard him. She looked up. He saw the fear in her eyes; he heard her utter a cry of anger and of pain.

"You! How dare you!"

She covered her face with her hands and turned away.

"It is not fair—it is not fair! I told you not to come."

He went and sat down beside her.

"Bess, I had to come. You were going away."

She shrank to the farther end of the seat, and still kept her face hidden behind her hands.

"Who told you that?"

"A friend. So, you see—I had to come. Why must you go away?"

She dropped her hands, but she kept her face averted. She stood up.

"You said a cruel thing to me once, but perhaps it was true—that I cared for nothing but my damned face. Now——! Well, I have my pride."

She made a movement towards the house, but he sprang up and caught her by the arms. She struggled, her face averted with an air of fierce humiliation.

"Don't be a cad, Arnold; let me go!"

"I'm not a cad," he said, "and I won't let you go. You have come to life, Bess. Don't you understand? Isn't the live woman more beautiful than the dead statue?"

She ceased to struggle, and he felt her body stiffen as though she were making some great inward effort.

"Let me go—please! I want you to——"

He released her, and she turned and stood with head erect, looking at him. Her eyes were full of fear, courage, an infinite questioning, a dread of what he would see in her, a yearning for that which she wished to see in him.

"Well?" she asked. "Well?"

"To me—you are more beautiful than ever," he said; "because you are awake—and because I love you as I did not love you then."

WARWICK DEEPING.



7

STORYTELLER

The Unexpected Face

AUGUST 1922

22

By Warwick Deeping

"Suddenly he did a snake-like squirm round the shoulder of the grey stone. He saw the sweating, cheese-coloured face of a man, the mouth agape, the eyes staring, the open shirt showing a black pelt on the chest. In the fellow's right hand——!"



R. SILAS P. WARNER strolled down into the town.

He was feeling at peace with himself and with all the world, this very beautiful world of the Riviera di Levante. His nostrils were full of the scent of mimosa; his hotel—the Hotel Europa—was exceedingly comfortable; he was young, but not too young; he had won the singles at two of the most fashionable of the French Riviera tennis tournaments. He had come to Italy, where he need play no more tennis. He meant to paint, to wander about the little sea towns and the hills, to freshen up his Italian, watch the fishermen, lie under the olives. His mood was one of pleasant relaxation. God was in His Heaven; all seemed right with this beautiful world.

The American had reached the end of the Via Balbi when he noticed a photographer's glass case hanging on a wall, and he turned aside to look at the portraits. One photograph in particular attracted his attention, the photograph of a girl.

Now it is notorious that a man carries about inside him a sort of dream-picture of the particular dream-woman who appeals to him, and Silas Warner saw the very reflection of his dream in that little oblong glass case belonging to this photographer of Grecco.

"My! That's queer," he thought. He took another look at the pic-

ture and strolled on, wondering whether this beautiful but fly-blown little Italian town held the original of the picture. That soft, sensitive oval face, those mysterious midnight eyes, that serene forehead and wreath of dusky hair! And then someone bumped into him and woke him up.

"Scuse," said a man with a frightened, angry, greasy face, who gave him a quick upward glare of the eyes, and then walked on in a great hurry.

The American smiled. The Via Balbi lay straight and sunlit before him, and as he looked down on it he received an impression of sudden human haste. Quite a number of figures were coming singly or in twos or threes up the long street, and moving with an expedition which suggested that they were in a hurry to leave something which was unpleasant. These hurrying male figures lacked dignity. Silas Warner saw heads pushed out of windows. Two women were whispering in a doorway, and he heard the words "bandierrà rossa."

Mr. Warner walked on, and as he neared the lower end of the Via Balbi he saw that the Piazza Cavour into which it opened was half full of a black and motionless crowd.

But it was neither a happy nor a homogeneous crowd, and the American's curiosity was piqued. In its centre hung the inevitable red flag, and about this emblem of greasy crudities the crowd seemed more solid and more truculent. In its outer rings the assembly was one of the loosest, and made up of sulky, self-conscious-looking people who

had the courage neither to approve nor to disapprove. It appeared to Warner that the Piazza Cavour was dominated by that solid group round the red flag. The quiet, decent people were overawed by a loud and energetic minority.

He pushed through until he reached the solid group about the flag, and finding himself next a big, blue-eyed old fellow with a magnificent white moustache, he asked him politely what the excitement was. The old fellow looked at him with obvious discomfort and a suggestion of shame.

"Oh, a little quarrel—you know. These Facisti have no sense."

He seemed shy of talking, and he looked anxiously at his neighbours.

"Hissing the flag! Just—foolishness! They caught the leader; the rest—well——" and holding his hands palms downwards he moved them to and fro.

Silas Warner nodded, remembering the anxious-looking men he had met hurrying up the Via Balbi. He wedged himself into this central group of noisy and truculent "reds," and, being a tall man, he found that he could see over the other fellows' heads.

"Make him kneel down," shouted someone, "make him kneel down."

The militant portion of the crowd was of no great size; in fact, it stood no more than three deep about the red flag and a circle which had been left clear. Three men stood in the circle, the bearer of the flag, a long, vociferous, thin man with the face of a goat, and the *fons* and *origo* of all the trouble—the leader of the Facisti. The long, thin man was shouting and gesticulating. The Nationalist stood facing him, a mere boy, not twenty, with a dead white face, upon which there were streaks and blotches of blood. He stood very stiff and straight, like a soldier, obviously very scared, yet refusing to confess it.

"Kneel down, kneel down!" roared the crowd.

"Make him kiss the flag."

Silas Warner stood with his head up, staring at this boy, whose face had startled him prodigiously. It bore a most extraordinary resemblance to the face of the girl he had seen in the photographer's glass case; it was a male copy of the female head, sensitive, refined, idealistic. Warner was conscious of feeling shocked.

"Kneel down!" shouted the crowd.

The lad answered them back.

"You were cowards in the war and you are cowards now."

Warner felt himself pushed forward, for the ring of angry men closed in suddenly upon the lad and began to kick and to strike. Yet there was cunning, the lust to torture, in the crowd's cruelty. This circle of fists and of savage faces contracted for a moment in a spasm of brutality, and then relaxed again like the coils of a snake. The victim was not to be crushed out the first squeeze, but played with, mocked, humiliated. The soul can be hurt as well as the body.

The lad was on the ground, on all fours, like a boxer who has been knocked out. He looked dazed; a little trickle of blood ran from one corner of his mouth.

"Hell!" said the American to himself. "Aren't there any police in this blessed town?"

And then he saw the lad get up on his feet, look round him desperately, and make an effort to pull himself together. His chin went up. He was not done with yet.

Silas Warner gave a little shiver. What business had he in the middle of this d—d crowd, he, an American, a stranger, watching a lad being beaten to pulp? The best thing for him to do was to get out of it, but the best thing would not realize itself and become the right. He knew—perhaps for the first time in his life—that any sort of angry crowd can be horrible—whether it be a crowd of slaughtermen or of bishops, and that this lad was defying the brute in the crowd. No, by

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God! it was more than that. He—Silas P. Warner—was being challenged. The lad's bloody and unconquered face was up against his own immortal soul! Didn't he think as this lad thought? Were not their ideals the same? Was he not out against mobs and the brute foolishness of the mob religion? Well—what about it? Was he going to do nothing, sneak away, and quit?

These thoughts were like so many flashes of Warner's brain. They roused a memory picture, a memory of the war, a picture of a dozen men crouching behind a bit of ruined wall in one of those red-pulped French villages, while a German machine-gun "clucked" somewhere ahead of them. Warner remembered how they had wallowed there, overawed by that infernal gun. He remembered the gradual shame of it swelling in him until it had burst with a yell, and he had gone over the wall with the rest of the boys following him.

As it had happened then so it happened now. He breasted through the crowd like a swimmer; he stood in the circle, smiling and looking across at rows of stupidly surprised faces; he walked up to the lad and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Say, you had better come home."

Still smiling, easily and strongly dominant, he actually pulled the lad out of the crowd, and the men let them pass. He thought that the affair was over. They were half-way across the piazza and threading their way through the scattered and hesitating figures, when the mob beast let out that howl. It was about the ugliest sound that Warner had ever heard; it seemed to vibrate in the very marrow of his spine.

"Run," said the lad, "run!"

They looked into each other's eyes for a moment, even as they broke into an instinctive trot.

"Your hotel," said the lad, "quick. I'll try for the hills."

The American's face cracked in a smile.

"Me for the hills, too," he answered. "Hell, but I'll see this through."

The sound came after them, voices and the grinding of heavy boots on the cobble stones. They sprinted up the Via Balbi, and half-way up it the Italian whirled sideways up a lane.

"This way."

Warner jerked a glance over his shoulder. About thirty yards away he saw a sort of blotch of white faces, knees jerking up and down, stamping feet. He fancied that one or two fists held knives, and that he had a glimpse of a pistol.

He bolted after the Italian.

"About twenty of them," he said. "Say, how far can you stick it?"

The lad understood.

"I was with the Bersaglieri; I can go all day."

"But they chewed you a bit! You haven't a pistol, have you?"

His comrade nodded and slapped a pocket.

"Mercy—why didn't you use it?"

"What, down there? What would have been the use? But—up there—yes."

They saved their breath after that and beat it up the lane, with heads popping out of the windows above them and that infernal pack of gutter fanaticism storming after them through the sunlight and the shadow. The lad ran like a deer, in spite of the punishing he had received, and Warner was in fine condition, and his long legs were made of leather.

"Say, some movie stunt this!"

But he was afraid, horribly afraid; it was the running away that did it. As some of the psychologists argue—it is the particular physical action which produces the particular emotion. The lane seemed to go on for ever; it was rutty and full of loose stones and rubbish, but between the walls and the houses Silas Warner had glimpses of the sunset above olive-clad hills.

"Crack!"

By Warwick Deeping

A shot ripped the air, and its reverberations re-echoed up the valley.

The American's mouth seemed to harden; his eyes caught the sunlight and returned it with a blue glare. The sound of that pistol shot reacted on him like the crack of a whip, flicking him to his first anger, an anger which grew. It simmered and boiled in him for the rest of the way up that dirty lane. He was angry with the ruts, and the stones, and the garbage. He was angry with himself for running away; he was still more angry with those roughs behind him for making him run away. His gorge began to rise. He, a six-foot American citizen, a graduate of Yale, a man of pep and of conviction bolting up Italian alleys with a mob of dagos at his heels! The farther he ran the more fiercely the white pride in him wanted to turn round and fight. His lungs were sound; his head had cleared; his heart felt clenched like a boxer's fist.

He looked back. The pursuit was straggling perceptibly. These square, heavy men were no longer in a bunch, but were strung out in lumps along the lane. The leader was the long, goat-faced fellow of the screaming voice and the gesticulating hands; he was also the possessor of the pistol.

Crack! It was followed by a "phut," like the sound of a bullet striking a sandbag.

"Oh, Madonna!" said the lad.

He had been hit in the flesh of the right arm just as he swerved to the left down a side alley, whose rough surface ascended between high walls towards the first terraces of the hills. It was a flesh wound, but serious in that it meant loss of blood.

Warner's eyes blazed.

"Run," he said; "get on. I'll follow up."

They were in the side alley now, and against the wall lay a pile of useful stones. The American pulled off his hat and grabbed ammuni-

tion. One, two, three, four, five in his hat, and one in his fist, six! he counted, moving his lips. He was all ears and eyes and muscles. A pair of heavily shod feet made a noise at the corner of the valley, and Warner's right hand swung back. Smash! The pistol went off in the air, and Mr. Goatee—hit fair on the forehead—sprawled and did not get up.

Silas Warner leapt out into the lane and pitched stones like one inspired. The straggling pursuit faltered, snarled, and was held off like a yellow dog. The American fired his ammunition, and made a fine streak of it up the alley, sighting his little comrade with the girl's face well ahead and climbing the first steps of a mule path that corkscrewed up the hills. It was here that Warner made the one mistake in the game he was playing against these "pass out the money" idealists. He had forgotten to possess himself of Mr. Goatee's pistol, and it was too late to turn back.

So he ran on, carrying his hat like a bomb-bag, and overtook the lad on the upward path. He had seen drops of blood on the stones.

"Made them stop and cerebrate for half a minute. Can you keep going?"

The lad was climbing ahead of him, and he tossed the words back over his shoulder.

"I can. That was brave of you."

"No, just temper. Say, what's your name?"

"Cesare Merisio."

"Mine's Warner, Silas, U.S.A."

At a turn of the path they were able to look down and see the "reds" climbing below them. The pursuers had lost distance and were bunched together again, a sign that their courage was of the sort that calls for a full chorus. And then Warner had an inspiration, an inspiration so delightful and so boyish that it showed the full gleam of a fine set of teeth. The path was bounded on the hillward side by a loose stone wall, and any intelligent

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ape could have grabbed pieces of rock and lobbed them on the gentlemen below.

"Snakes!"

He did it with exultation and rapidity, letting out the Yale cry, like some happy, whirling dervish. The rocks bounded and percussed, and their moral effect was considerable. One landed like thunder at the foot of the foremost man and bounced off into space. A bunch of heads and shoulders bobbed down under cover of the wall, and promised to remain there so long as the hillside rumbled stones.

Silas P. Warner laughed. His voice carried to the lad on the path above.

"Get on. I'll give them time to cerebrate."

He had begun to enjoy himself. The game was as easy as eating pie. He had only to indulge in judicious rock-shying at convenient corners while the lad with the girl's face went steadily up. He heaved a last stone and dashed on up the path.

"Say," he said when he overtook the lad's surely ascending heels; "suppose we are getting somewhere?"

The Italian threw out his left arm.

"Up there. San Lorenzo—our village. That's my place. They'll help."

He spoke jerkily, in spasms, and Warner looked at him anxiously.

"Excelsior! Can you stick it?"

"Yes," said the lad as though biting his own breath.

They went on and up, but more slowly, and Warner's rearguard actions were conducted with more grimness. The novelty of it wore off, and it had had the effect of enraging the hot and sweaty gentlemen below. They adopted new tactics; they scattered when each bombardment opened, and, leaving the path, took to scrambling up the hillside. These outflanking movements were dangerous. Someone had collected Mr. Goatee's pistol and ammunition, and took occa-

sional pot-shots at the American. Warner's smile became a rather dangerous grin.

"If that boy cracks," he thought, "this is going to be some gamble."

The steep flank of the hill eased off into a long wooded ridge, with pines, ilexes and oaks rising out of the fragrant maquis. Here it was a question of speed, and delaying tactics would be more dangerous than useful. Warner drew level with Cesare, and loped along at his side.

"Much farther?" he asked.

He noticed that the lad's lips had gone white.

"One more hill."

"You won't do it," thought the American. "You are beat to the world."

But Cesare struggled on, and they were half-way up the last hill before his heart gave out, and he crumpled up in a faint. They had reached a point where two great boulders lay on either side of the path like cyclopean gate-posts, and Warner lifted the lad and put him behind one of the stones. Cesare had handed over his pistol to the American before they had started climbing the last hill, and Warner crouched down behind the other stone. The pursuit was very near. He could hear the clatter of feet and heavy breathing.

He felt cool, amazingly cool. He was aware of the sunset, of the rosy light upon the opposite hills, of Grecco gleaming white below him on the edge of the blue sea. A great ilex hung black overhead.

If only he could get that fellow with the pistol!

Queer, the resemblance between the lad just there and the girl whose face he had seen in that glass case!

How long ago was it? A whole day seemed to have passed since he had started on that casual walk from his hotel.

Suddenly he did a snake-like squirm round the shoulder of the grey stone. He saw the sweating, cheese-coloured face of a man, the

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mouth agape, the eyes staring, the open shirt showing a black pelt on the chest. In the fellow's right hand—!

"God's own luck," he thought as he fired.

Next moment Warner was up and out and reaching for something which lay on the stones. He sprang to his full height, seeing below him that little mob of hot, panting men.

"Hands up!"

They understood the silent mouths of those little iron quipsters better than they understood his language. They stared, they blinked; he saw one man moisten his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. Another was surreptitiously pocketing a knife. There was something ludicrous, oafish in their air of heavy, stultified helplessness. They had scrambled and sweated for nearly an hour to be faced with this anticlimax.

In very crude but forcible Italian Silas P. Warner told them what he thought of them. Then he ordered them to face about and return by the fool's path to Grecco.

They went.

He followed them down the hill, driving them before him, and reaching a sort of pulpit rock perched beside the path, he coolly sat down and watched them fritter away upon the hillside.

"That's that!" he thought; "but I guess there will be a hell of a row about the fellow I have laid out up yonder."

Turning back up the hill he heard voices, and for the moment he thought that a party of "reds" had worked up behind him and spoilt his nicely finished climax, but the figure of Cesare, poised on the stone behind which Warner had laid him, reassured him. A big, swarthy fellow in a striped shirt and apricot-coloured breeches was wrapping a red handkerchief round Cesare's arm. Two other men were bending over the wounded Communist. Several more stood grouped on the path, stout fellows with

broad, pleasant faces, and the air of hillmen and peasants.

Cesare jumped down off his rock and embraced the American.

"Amico mio—!"

He was excited, faintly flushed, but quick enough to be amused by Warner's embarrassment.

"You did it—all by yourself—and now you look half ashamed! That is English, what? Guiseppe, Sandro, this is the gentleman who dragged me out from under the boots of those roughs and fought them back all the way from Grecco."

The men gathered round Warner; they smiled on him with their dark eyes, patted him, shook his hands.

"It was a good day's work, signore."

Silas Warner smiled round at them all, his teeth very white in his brown face. He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"That's all right," he said.

"Seems to me I shall have to hurry or I shall miss my dinner."

But he was to take his dinner on the hills and not at the Hotel Europa. Neither Cesare nor his peasants would have let him go.

They took him along with them up towards San Lorenzo village, and Warner did not protest. He had a feeling that the cap was yet to be fitted to the head of the adventure. He had become the victim of a most absurd suspicion. But surely—it wasn't possible! Though some southern women did carry a little powdering of black hair on the upper lip!

Cesare, still very white, held on to his arm, and poured out suggestions, explanations. The peasants followed, lugging the wounded man.

"Yes, you see—our villa is up there; it is our village; it has been our village for hundreds of years; we and our people have never quarrelled. You will stay at our villa. A hotel? Nonsense. What is a hotel but a barrack, a few palm trees, and three or four waiters in tail coats."

"But my luggage is down there."

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"We will write a letter to the proprietor and send a cart for it."

Silas Warner loped along beside him with a puzzled and half-expectant smile. They had reached the high road and the first white houses of the village, with the pink-and-white campanile of the church towering across the sunset. The hills were grey with olives, but San Lorenzo itself was a village of fruit trees, and cypresses, and great, solemn pines.

An iron gate in a high wall, two rows of towering cypresses, the gleam of a white house half concealed among trees! Cesare pushed open the gate, and became aware of the pressure of Warner's fingers.

"Look here—it is a queer sort of question I am going to ask you—but I can't get it out of my head."

The Italian gave him a wide, upward glance

"Well?"

"You are not a——?"

But Silas Warner never completed the asking of that very embarrassing question. The last word was snatched away from his lips. He had been staring down the avenue of cypresses towards the house, and between the stately blackness of those trees came a movement, something white, a figure of youth, swift and delightful. Warner stood stiff and erect. His hand gripped the lad's arm, and he gripped it with such force that he bruised the skin.

"Amico mio! What is the matter?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing," said the tall man, staring at the girl.

WARWICK DEEPING.

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The decision of the Committee shall be accepted as final.

The contest will close for the reception of MSS. on September 30th, 1922.

Also for

THE STORY-TELLER

July 1921

(23)

Sheik Jahir

By Warwick Deeping

"The man's face was like the face out of an evil dream, hawk-nosed, haughty, yet fiercely ironical, with great sombre, lustful eyes, and teeth that flashed in his black beard.

"He was staring at Lola Bikelas . . ."



R. LANCELOT TWEEDALE'S ass stood patiently in the narrow Cairene street while Mr. Tweedale's *laquais de place* hammered on a big blue gate under a horse-shoe-shaped arch of white stone. A little crowd had begun to gather round the Englishman and his donkey, and Tweedale hated crowds.

"Dash it all, fellah, are we going to be here all day?"

An old hag had begun to pester the Englishman for backsheesh, even to the point of laying a very dirty hand on Mr. Tweedale's white trousers. The big man glared at her through his cyeglass. He looked a little ridiculous, straddling that small moke, with his feet about three inches from the ground, but never in all his life had Lancelot Tweedale realized that it was possible for him to look ridiculous. He had been pulled out of an arm-chair in his Pall Mall Club by a deputation of Lord Grimshaw's sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins, who had persuaded him to travel all the way to Egypt to reason with a man whom his Victorian relatives thought shamefully mad.

"We rely on you, my dear Lancelot. If anyone can make him see reason, etc., etc. This scandal cannot go on."

Mr. Tweedale had agreed with the sisters, aunts, and uncles. Of

course he was the one man who was most likely to persuade Grimshaw that this Oriental escapade was "dashed bad form." But Mr. Tweedale did not like Cairo, or this Arab crowd, or the donkey, or the old hag with the dirty hands. He was a rather exquisite person.

The blue gate opened at last; a negro with lips like sausages salaamed before the Glass-Eyed Effendi, and Tweedale, his donkey, and his donkey-boy disappeared into the courtyard of Lord Grimshaw's house in the Arab quarter of Cairo. The *laquais de place* was abusing the negro, and the negro was jabbering back at him. Tweedale got off his donkey and looked about him with solemn curiosity.

The courtyard was a dim and mysterious place, surrounded with arcades and galleries and little criss-cross shuttered windows that were like eyes behind dropped veils. A fountain played in the centre of the court. Pigeons fluttered against the upper blue of the sky. A big dog that had been lying in a patch of sunlight came and sniffed at Tweedale's legs. The brute made Tweedale feel uncomfortable; he wondered whether he had brought in some smell from that old hag's fawning hands, some smell that this beast of a dog disliked.

"The Lord Grimshaw—he expect you, sar," said the *laquais de place*, and Tweedale followed the negro.

He found himself led down dim galleries to a room on the ground-floor of the house, a room whose pointed windows opened on a gar-

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den. The floor of the room was of marble, and splashed with the colours of Persian rugs. In a big stone font full of water floated a little brass bowl, and in this bowl some perfume was burning. Tweedale glimpsed carved coffer and inlaid cabinets ranged against the walls, the old painted glass in the windows, the greenness of a well-watered garden. By one of the open windows lay a divan, and lounging on it a tall man in white trousers, red sash, and white silk shirt, a young man with the bronze face of an ironical yet rather fierce Greek god.

"Hullo, Tweedy! Sit down, dear boy."

Grimshaw did not get up. His blue eyes looked vaguely amused, as though he were mimicking the languid air of this tow-headed lion. Tweedale's nostrils twitched as he looked round for the non-existent chair; it was the perfume of the burning powder that offended him.

"Faugh! My dear fellah——"

Two little lines sprang up between Grimshaw's straight eyebrows.

"Sit down," he said, rather sharply; "it's not so bad as the stuff that Aunt Victoria uses to discourage the moths. No; there is no chair, Tweedy. You'll have to use that bit of carpet."

Tweedale focused the square of carpet with his eyeglass.

"My dear Richard," he said, "I may have expected a flippant reception——"

Grimshaw sat up.

"Then why the devil did you come?"

Tweedale dropped his eyeglass, and it dangled to and fro at the end of its black ribbon.

"A sense of duty, dear fellah——"

"That's exactly what I expected you to say. When an Englishman is posed—he always falls back on his sense of duty."

He lay back in his cushions, and laughed the laughter of a man who is fit in body and soul.

"Sit down, old chap. Here, take this cushion."

The red cushion hit Tweedale in the stomach, but the "deputation" was on its dignity; it refused to sit down; it walked to and fro pulling its long whiskers.

"If you have no sense of duty towards your family, my dear fellah——"

"None at all, Tweedy, none at all. They never understood me, and I understood them too well. Oh, my God! don't you ever get bored, Tweedy, with Piccadilly and crinolines, and a lot of mincing women, and the old crabs in the clubs——"

"I am an English gentleman," said the "deputation," "and let me tell you, sir, I am proud——"

"Drop it, man, drop it! Do you really think that my Aunts Victoria and Alexandria, and my Uncle Albert understand the sort of man that is inside me? I'm made to live, not to hand round tea-cups."

The "deputation" grew argumentative.

"But think of your reputation, my dear fellah. You weally can't behave like that boulder Byron."

The bronze-headed man on the divan grew suddenly fierce.

"Look here," he said, "please understand once and for all that I mean to live my life without interference. I am a bit of a wild man, not a sheep."

He clapped his hands together, and a slave in a white turban and blue robes entered with sherbert, coffee, a decanter of brandy and bottles of soda-water. Tweedale, remembering that he had always posed as a man of the world and a philosopher, sat down on the cushion, his long legs bent up like two inverted V's. He accepted a brandy and soda, and the silent slave departed.

"Quite like the Arabian Nights, my dear chap," he said; "but what on earth am I to tell your family——"

"Tell them the truth. I am not married to either of my aunts, and Uncle Albert receives his pocket-money regularly. Hales writes to

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me that there is nothing wrong with the estates. And they think me a sort of second Byron, is that it?"

Tweedale nodded. The brandy had begun to mellow his pomposity.

"It is getting talked about. It is even suggested——"

"That I have a harem!"

Tweedale cleared his throat.

"Precisely so."

And Grimshaw laughed, but his laughter was not without fierceness.

"I have no harem—no Circassian beauties! But I love this life; I love it because it is as old as time, because it is full of a wild naturalness, because it is so frankly and gloriously human. I go for gallops over the desert, I come back, I bathe, I am rubbed down with perfumes, I lie here and meditate and listen to the negroes splashing water about the garden. I go out into the streets, and the life is ten thousand years old. You feel that an adventure is coming to you round every corner and out of every dim courtyard. At night you can sit on the roof and watch the stars, not the cold stars of the north——"

Tweedale looked uncomfortable. That an English aristocrat should be so thoroughly unEnglish——"

"Flesh-pots," he said solemnly, "flesh-pots!"

But Grimshaw's smile made him feel still more uncomfortable.

"Do not go away with the notion, Tweedale, that I am a sort of effete Sardanapalus. I ride twenty miles each day. I can snuff a candle at twenty paces with a revolver. I box with an Irish ex-sergeant-major. An Italian comes and fights me with foils, and I even take lessons in dagger-play from a scoundrelly Arnaoot. I can race any living Arab up the pyramid of Cheops."

Tweedale had nothing to say. He glanced at Grimshaw's superb throat and head, and could find no fault with his physique. Grimshaw was a magnificent animal, and more than that. He might be eccentric, but he was an aristocrat still, an aristocrat of a thousand years.

But when Tweedale remounted his donkey and rode back to lunch at the Hotel d'Orient, he was haunted by the old catch-phrase that is so cosmopolitan and so ancient:

"*Cherchez la femme!* There must be a woman."

There was a woman, and it was a mere coincidence that Mr. Lancelot Tweedale discovered her. Not that the discovery was to have any bearing upon the eccentricity of Lord Grimshaw's career, or to dissipate the nice alarm of his uncles and aunts in England. Quite the contrary. It happened that Tweedale hired a carriage and drove out to the Ezbekieh plain to see the notables of Cairo and the officials of the Great Pasha's government drive and ride through the avenues and gardens. As Tweedale's carriage trundled him through this oriental yet cosmopolitan crowd he was overtaken and passed by a man riding a black Arab thoroughbred. It was Grimshaw. He did not see Tweedale, for he was on the watch for something far more radiant and compelling than Glass-Eye Effendi's tow head.

Tweedale still had him in sight when a yellow-wheeled barouche drawn by two white horses flashed round from behind a group of palms. The black Arab was pulled up; so were the white horses of the barouche. Tweedale saw Grimshaw dismount and throw his bridle to a servant. There was a woman in the barouche.

The temptation was too great, and Mr. Lancelot Tweedale so far sank his dignity as to play the Peeping Tom. He let his driver take him a little farther along the avenue, and then ordered him to pull up and wait. Tweedale got out and mixed with the crowd, and strolling back along the avenue so contrived it that he obtained a good look at Grimshaw and the lady.

She was a European, quite young, in fact a mere girl. And yet there was something Oriental about her. She had a little brilliant red mouth,

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the dark eyes of an Eastern dream, a mass of crisp brown-black hair. Her little nose had the most provoking and audacious curves; it was like a note of defiance above that tender, seductive mouth. She was not only a beauty, but an intelligent beauty, ready with swift laughter and a flash of the eyes. Her dress was of the simplest, yellow and white, with nothing Parisian about it, natural, rather flowing, in beautiful lines.

Grimshaw was leaning over the side of the barouche, talking to this girl. He was Leander at Hero's window. The whole thing was so obvious that even Tweedale appreciated it.

"I wonder who the devil she is?"

His eyeglass glittered suggestively.

"Dashed pretty woman, anyhow!"

A man's aunts never do understand!"

It was his unsubtle acceptance of something that was inevitable. Tweedale had an eye for a woman, sheep that he was. As for Grimshaw's aunts—

He would have stayed longer, but the sudden attentions of two very unwholesome-looking beggars sent Tweedale back to his carriage. Perhaps he would be able to find out at the hotel? And so he drifted off the stage at the very moment when Grimshaw of the bronze head was to become involved in one of those wild and elemental affairs that the ordinary Englishman would never dream of. Tweedale disappeared. When he reappeared there was nothing left for him to do but to take the next steamer home and put up his feet on the same club chair. The girl's name was Lola Bikelas. Her father was a Greek, O Murios Adamantios Bikelas, emporos, with a warehouse somewhere in the Muski district, and a villa on the Nile. Tweedale found out all that before he left. Old Bikelas was wealthy, but not quite up to the standard of Homer.

"They are worrying about me in England."

That was what Grimshaw was saying to Lola Bikelas, and showing laughing white teeth in a brown face.

But she did not laugh.

"You are going away?"

He leant over towards her.

"Only—if you send me away. You know that I love this life."

His eyes added: "And you."

They were speaking in French, and sometimes Grimshaw would try his Oxford Greek on her, and they would laugh over its literary flavour.

"But some day," she said, "you will have to go back to England."

"Why should I? Whenever I think of England I think of Wormwood Scrubs in November. But then you don't know Wormwood Scrubs."

"What is it?" she asked.

"A cemetery."

She looked at him with her air of soft, sympathetic languor.

"Is it cold there? You love this richer, simpler life, and so do I. It's all so fascinating. Sometimes I think that I should like to wander all over the world."

"India, China, Mexico, always in the sun," he laughed.

He noticed suddenly that her face seemed to sharpen. Her red mouth hardened; her nostrils grew haughty. Her eyes were looking beyond him and over his shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That man."

"What—again?"

"Don't move," she said. "Look at Abdul up there. Even he is afraid."

Grimshaw glanced at the fat Cairene coachman. The man was sitting on the box in a curious, crouching attitude, his heavy round head sunk between his shoulders. The tan on Grimshaw's face seemed to deepen. He turned slowly and deliberately, ignoring a sudden movement of Lola's hand.

Standing under one of the palm trees at the side of the road was a tall Arab with a shock of jet black

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hair. He wore nothing but a long white cotton shirt, and he carried a staff in his hand. The man's face was like the face out of an evil dream, hawk-nosed, haughty, yet fiercely ironical, with great sombre, lustful eyes, and teeth that flashed in his black beard.

He was staring at Lola Bikelas, but when Grimshaw turned on him he flashed his eyes on the Englishman.

Grimshaw walked up to the Arab.

"Sheik," he said, "the eyes of a holy man wax insolent? It is not pleasing to me, nor is it pleasing to the lady."

The Arab spat upon the ground.

"The face that is not veiled need not be respected," he answered.

"It may be that a giaour will teach you to respect."

Sheik Jahir raised his staff.

"I have but to call upon the faithful and you would die like a dog," he said; "if the woman pleases me she pleases the favoured of Allah."

The white horses of Lola's barouche were showing a sudden restiveness, and a crowd had begun to gather. Grimshaw knew the uncertain and fanatical temper of an Eastern crowd, moreover he was aware of the sacredness and the power of the man in the white shirt. This fellow was Master of the Hag, the leader of the sacred procession to Mecca. He could do as much as he pleased in Cairo. The mob was at his service. The Egyptian police would be in no hurry to interfere. Grimshaw went back to the girl.

"I will ride home with you."

Lola was white and troubled.

"The man haunts me," she said.

Grimshaw spoke to the coachman, who turned his horses and seemed only too ready to get away. The Englishman mounted his Arab and followed the barouche, and his two servants trotted behind him. When they had cleared the crowd and were moving down one of the quieter avenues, Grimshaw brought his horse level with the carriage.

"I had better see your father," he said.

Lola glanced at the fat coachman's back.

"Do not talk—here. They will chatter to each other."

It was sunset when Grimshaw left Bikelas's villa, and the two servants who rode with him said to each other: "The Effendi angry."

Half an hour later a secretary at the English consulate was listening to this angry man explaining a most extraordinary situation. The secretary was a polite young official in spectacles, not quite so mild and simple as he looked, and something of a cynic. His name was Smith.

"Well, sir, what do you want us to do?"

Grimshaw was still very angry.

"I want you to tell me if a fanatical brute like Sheik Jahir can defy all the consulates in Cairo."

Smith smiled a little cynical apologetic smile.

"As a matter of fact, sir, he can. You see, this is not London—"

Grimshaw gave a toss of the head like a big dog shaking off water.

"It's a most damnable and absurd tangle! These Greeks seem amazing cowards. The only one who has any courage is the girl."

Smith looked over the tops of his spectacles.

"You see, sir," he said, "we infidels are here on sufferance. Mr. Bikelas is a merchant. Unpleasant things do happen to inoffensive Europeans if they offend a man who can stir up a fanatical mob."

"So it comes to this: that big brute could kidnap Bikelas's daughter, and no official in Cairo could stop it!"

The secretary nodded.

"It comes to that. We protest, we take action, but things happen while we are talking. These people look at things so differently. The only suggestion I can make is that the lady should leave Egypt—as soon as possible."

"I see," said Grimshaw, with a very ugly but quiet smile, "I see."

Sheik Jahir

He left the consulate, mounted his horse, and rode back to his house in the Arab quarter. Darkness had fallen when he reached the lane leading to the house, and from the shadow of a wall two men sprang out at him. Grimshaw was saved by the swerving of his horse. He fired one shot into the darkness, and heard the sound of men running. His two servants, as scared as sheep, had stood huddled against a wall, not offering to help him.

When the negro porter opened the gate, Grimshaw called to one of the men to come and take his horse. No one appeared, nor was there any reply. The servants had slunk away.

Grimshaw lay down on the divan to eat his dinner. His favourite negro served him, and Grimshaw noticed that the black watched him with a mute and anxious timidity.

"What is it, Ali? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

The man flopped suddenly down upon his knees.

"Will my lord be warned by his servant? Go to the great house of the Franks. Let my lord hide himself there."

Grimshaw's eyes hardened.

"Ali," he said, "you may mean well by me. But a Frankish lord does not hide in a cupboard."

The dinner was over, and Ali had gone for the coffee. He did not reappear. An extraordinary silence filled the house; a silence that seemed to flow in like the floodwaters of the Nile into some old temple. Grimshaw picked up the silver hand-bell and rang it. No one appeared, and yet he fancied he could hear the sound of someone breathing.

He clapped his hands together.

"Ali—"

A black curtain covered the doorway, and Grimshaw saw a hand grasp the edge of the curtain and draw it back. A man stood in the doorway, a man in a white cotton shirt. It was Sheik Jahir.

Grimshaw did not move, but he

lay with one hand on the butt of his revolver.

Jahir came forward into the room. "Allah is here," he said, "and Allah is merciful."

He sat down on a square of carpet under the hanging lamp. Grimshaw smiled at him, and the Arab returned his smile.

"You are welcome, O—Sheik. Shall my servants bring you coffee or sherbert?"

Jahir bowed as he sat.

"The Effendi has no servants. They have gone."

Grimshaw sat up and faced him.

"The Sheik has given them his orders?"

"The holy man is obeyed."

They looked at each other in silence. Then Jahir spread his hands.

"I have given the Frank a warning, for like Allah I am merciful. Is his heart still obstinate?"

His lean face was ironical, threatening. It was a challenge from the East to the West.

Grimshaw accepted it.

"His heart is as obstinate as a rock," he said.

Jahir's teeth flashed white in his beard.

"Listen, O giaour," he said; "they say that in your own land you are a great Effendi, a sheik. We are lords among men; we will behave as lords towards each other. The dark-eyed dove is marked down for the cage. The girl is ripe for the arms of her lover, and in my arms I will teach her to love. Nevertheless I do not fear the infidel who is my rival. I will treat him with honour. When the marriage feast is ready I will send him a summons."

"Sheik Jahir, he will come."

"Alone. If he comes not alone, something will happen to the girl, and she will die."

"Will Sheik Jahir be alone?"

"He will. He swears it—on the beard of the Prophet."

Grimshaw looked at the Arab. He had begun to understand.

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"Shall we be armed?"

"Our hands will be naked, Effendi. If thou comest I shall make thy dead body a stool for my feet."

Grimshaw made the sign of the cross.

"By the sacred symbol I swear that I will come alone. If you break faith may your God spit upon you."

Jahir rose.

"I shall not fear to be alone with you, Effendi. Let the girl be to him whose hands are the stronger."

He drew himself up, laughed, and disappeared behind the black curtain.

Grimshaw lit his chibook, and sat for awhile, smoking and thinking. How far to trust Jahir he did not know, but he had more than a suspicion that there was nothing to be done but to trust him. The Arab was a mixture of savagery, passion, pride and chivalry. If Jahir played fair, it would be a battle of wild men, a fight to the death with teeth and feet and hands.

Grimshaw looked grim. The primitive male in him had been challenged.

Presently he went to explore the house. As Jahir had said, not a servant remained; they had fled, leaving the lamps burning and the gate of the courtyard open. Grimshaw found his horse in the stable.

He saddled and bridled the beast, and rode out into the Cairene night. No one molested him, and yet he felt that he was watched, and that every lattice was an eye.

He rode through Cairo to the house of Adamantios Bikelas the Greek. There were lights burning behind the shutters. He left his horse tied to a tree in the garden, knocked, and was admitted. In the big saloon with its French furniture he found an old man sitting wrapped up in a coat, his face as yellow as a lemon, an old man who shivered. On the inlaid eastern stool beside his chair stood a bottle, a carafe, and two glasses.

The Greek looked with a sort of

helpless and senile shame at Grimshaw.

"Lola has gone," he said; "she went away two hours ago."

"To the consulate?"

Bikelas shook his head.

"Men came and took her," he said; "wild men——"

He seemed to cower, holding up one hand.

"Do not look at me like that. What could I do? We were at dinner; my servants ran away. They brought us into this room, and made me swear that I would send no message. They made her drink what was in that bottle——"

Grimshaw picked it up, poured out some of the stuff into one of the glasses, and sipped it.

"Poisoned?"

Bikelas looked at him.

"No, no, not poison. Hachich."

Grimshaw put down the glass. The yellow face of the Greek made him think of a bent and wrinkled spade-guinea. A sudden nausea overcame him; he wanted to spit, get away into the clean night air.

He turned at the door.

"Where have they taken her? Do you know?"

"I know nothing, nothing," and old Bikelas held up his hands.

Grimshaw mounted his horse and rode back into Cairo. He did not trouble to call at the consulate or to appeal to the police, for he knew that this affair was beyond and above the law. Civilization was represented by old Bikelas sitting helplessly in his chair, while this wild man of the desert set codes and compromises at defiance. There could be no compromise with Sheik Jahir, any more than you can compromise with a leopard.

Grimshaw had ridden into the courtyard of his house when he became aware of a figure standing under the bracket lamp that lighted the inner gateway. He covered the figure with his revolver.

"Who's that?"

"A messenger from the Master of the Hag, O Effendi."

Sheik Jahir

"Approach."

The man salaamed, and moved forward.

"I come from Sheik Jahir, O Effendi, to know if thy heart is still big within thee."

"My heart has not changed. What other message do you bring?"

"Sheik Jahir sends you this message: 'The Greek girl lies in my arms. If the giaour has courage he will come and strive with me for her. He who brings you the message will be your guide.'"

"No more?"

"The Effendi must go unarmed."

Grimshaw threw his revolver at the man's feet.

"There is my pledge. Where do we go?"

"It is half a night's journey, Effendi. Sheik Jahir waits for you at the ruined tomb of the Mad Prophet."

"It may be that I am madder than that prophet. Lead on."

Grimshaw rode through the night with the Arab guide walking beside his horse. They had turned south after leaving the city; and the great silver stars blazed down on them out of the deep azure of the sky. The desert looked as grey as the sea, a sea whose waves had been turned into rock and sand by some ancient enchantment.

Two hours before dawn the Arab pointed towards the south.

"We are there, O Effendi."

Grimshaw could distinguish a greyness ahead of them, a jumble of outlines that shaped themselves gradually into the broken walls of a ruined building. The Arab halted, holding Grimshaw's horse by the bridle, and Grimshaw felt the horse shiver.

"I go no farther, Effendi. My orders are to return."

"Jahir is there?"

"Go forward and you will find him."

The Englishman knew that he might be walking into a trap, but pride of race and the thought of Lola sent him towards the ruin.

There was no fear in him, but rather a savage excitement.

When he had come within fifty paces of the ruin he saw a motionless figure like an obelisk set in the sand.

"Jahir," he challenged.

"It is I, O giaour."

Grimshaw rode up to him and dismounted.

"I am here, and alone."

They looked at each other in the darkness.

"Art thou unarmed?"

"I keep my promises."

"Nevertheless—I must be sure."

Grimshaw put up his hands.

"Search me," he said.

Jahir searched him, and his breath was in Grimshaw's face, and it smelt like the breath of a dog. Jahir was stark naked, his body sleek with oil.

"The Frank is a man of his word."

He stood back, but it was Grimshaw's turn to state his terms.

"She is here?"

Jahir pointed to the ruins.

"The giaour would look upon her beauty before I make it mine?"

Grimshaw nodded.

"I would see her," he said.

They tethered the Englishman's horse to the trunk of a forlorn palm tree, and Jahir made a jest of it.

"He will be useful to me, O Effendi."

"Be not so sure," said his enemy.

They entered the ruin, and Jahir led the way up an old winding stair that climbed to the broad top of one of the walls. Just below the parapet was the shell of a little room set in the angle of a tower, and in this room a tiny lamp was burning.

"Behold my bride," said Jahir.

Grimshaw saw Lola lying asleep on a sheepskin. She was dressed in eastern stuffs of yellow, white, and purple; her arms were bare, and about her neck hung a necklace of turquoise and amber.

"Behold my bride," said Jahir again.

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The Englishman turned on him fiercely.

"Enough. We will settle that below."

In the ruin was a courtyard lit by the stars, and floored with the desert sand, and it was here that these two men fought for Lola Bikelas. The advantage was with Jahir. His naked body was so oiled and polished that Grimshaw could get no grip on him, while his own clothes helped the Arab. Jahir, lithe as a black snake, got Grimshaw down and under him, and fought for the white man's throat.

Grimshaw, with the oiled and sweating body of this savage swarming over him, felt Jahir's long hair in his eyes. He managed to get his hands to the Arab's head, and gripping a handful of hair on either side he put all the strength of his arms and shoulders into twisting Jahir's head. The trick worked, and Grimshaw rolled the Arab off him, and coming above, drove his right knee under Jahir's ribs. A second punch of the knee knocked the breath out of the sheik's body. He turned over and clutched at the sand.

Grimshaw got up, panting. The first bout was over and he had won it, but Jahir's cunning was at work while he lay recovering his breath. A black arm shot out, and a hand caught Grimshaw by the ankle, bringing him down. And Jahir was no longer unarmed; he had picked up a stone and was striking at Grimshaw's head.

There was but one thing for the Englishman to do, and he did it, butting his head under the Arab's chin, and groping for Jahir's right wrist. The luck was with him, and he caught that wrist. Now Grimshaw was very strong in the arms, and he knew a trick or two in the handling of "roughs." He bent Jahir's arm and then twisted it behind the Arab's back. For a moment they struggled together, and then Jahir's

arm gave at the shoulder joint and he dropped that stone.

Yet with his right arm useless, Jahir's fury seemed to increase. He clung to Grimshaw with legs and arm, and the Englishman felt the Arab's teeth biting at his throat. Both men were mad now, like two animals fighting to kill. They rolled over and over, till the Englishman's two hands gave him the mastery, and Sheik Jahir lay still.

Grimshaw staggered to his feet, battered and exhausted. His coat had been torn off, and his shirt ripped to the waist, and his hair was in his eyes. And then his knees gave way under him. He fainted, and fell across Jahir's body.

The stars were growing dim when the Englishman dragged himself up the stairway leading to the top of the ruined wall. The lamp was still burning in the little room, but when Grimshaw looked into the room he saw no Lola there. For the moment he felt shocked and bewildered. Either Jahir had fooled him even in defeat or something had happened under those paling stars.

Grimshaw pressed his forehead against the cold stone. And then he heard a little sigh. It seemed to come from the top of the wall, and Grimshaw's body straightened.

The first redness of the dawn was showing above the purple edge of the desert, and standing with her back to the dawn, her hands clasped behind her head, he saw Lola Bikelas. She stood poised on the very edge of the wall, and Grimshaw held his breath. It was borne in upon him that she meant to throw herself down, to give herself to death rather than to Sheik Jahir.

Silently and cautiously he drew himself up, till he was so near to her that he could reach out and grasp her clothes. And then he called her softly by name.

"Lola."

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The Heart of Tua the Princess

By Warwick Deeping

"On the fifth night, my daughter, thou wilt take Prince Shabak as thy husband. Hast thou aught to say?"

"Tua smiled a strange smile.

"What the god wills shall happen, O my father. Ammon has sent me a vision. I wait upon the will of the god."



HABAK the Ethiopian had cast his eyes on the throne of the Pharaohs and on the beauty of Tua, the Royal Daughter, heiress of all Egypt. For the Pharaoh of those days was old and a dotard, a learned fool lost among his concubines and creatures, and death was overtaking the land.

In the cool of the evening Tua the Princess, Tua the Royal Daughter, walked on the roof of her palace and watched the blue dusk floating out of the East.

Old Merkara, Tua's nurse, waddled beside the Princess—fat Merkara, ugly but very faithful.

"The crowd is greater than ever to-night, my Mistress," said Merkara, looking over the parapet.

A great highway skirted the palace wall, a highway lined with stone sphinxes and palms and crowded with all the life of the city. The great brown space was full of dust and colour, chariots, camels, palanquins, soldiers, old women, children, chattering girls.

"They stand and stare," said the Princess.

"At the sun that rises as the sun sets. Show yourself to them, O Royal Daughter."

Tua stood by the parapet so that the people could see her, and there were pity and scorn in her heart. She was the great lady, mysterious, sacred, glimpsed from a distance

like a goddess, and yet in her heart a woman among women. She knew why the people loitered and gaped outside her palace. It was to see Shabak, Chief Lord of the Mercenaries, drive by in his chariot, Shabak, who was more king of Egypt than any Pharaoh.

The people lifted their hands to the daughter of Pharaoh, who wore the shining uraeus on her forehead.

"Great Princess, Tua the Beautiful," they called her.

And beautiful she was, tall, slim and splendid.

But Tua was a woman, and she was sad. She looked down at this Egyptian crowd, so careless, so noisy and so gay, these chattering whom strange conquerors from strange lands might trample into the dust. Across the forecourt and dromos of a temple she saw the breadth of the great Nile, that river of mystery, banded by the black shadows thrown by temples and palm groves.

"These people are fools," said the Princess, looking down at them with sudden disdain.

"All men are fools, O Royal Daughter," echoed Merkara, "and we women have to dress to them. But if the sheep are foolish——"

She stuffed a sweetmeat into her big mouth.

"It is because of the shepherd. Old woman, do I not know that there is fear in the land and fear in the house of Pharaoh? The land has lost her greatness. Look down into the crowd and tell me what you see."

The Heart of Tua the Princess

"I see fat men," said Merkara, "fat men who think all day of their own bellies."

"What else?"

"I see Prince Ptahmes, your brother, lolling in a litter with a mop of flowers on his forehead."

"Even so, when his arms should be brown and hard and straining at the reins of a chariot."

"I see Nefehér, Scribe of the Records, riding by on a white ass."

"And he is of more account than the King's son, a man oiled and scented, puffed for breath, the fool of any dancing girl. Yes? But who are those men yonder, loitering under the palms?"

"Soldiers, O Royal Daughter, soldiers of the guard."

"What faces have they?"

"The faces of Libyans and Cushites, O Princess, ugly men and strong, but the wanton girls love them."

Tua's dark eyes grew big and fierce.

"Hired men, barbarians, blacks! Who should guard Pharaoh but men of Egypt, who should guard Egypt but her own sons? What else see you, Merkara?"

The old woman wrinkled up her forehead and half closed her eyes.

"I see the chariot of Shabak," she said, "of Shabak the Ethiopian, the chariot with the red wheels."

And the body of Tua straightened as though she had been stung with a whip. She stood close and square to the parapet, her finger tips resting on the stone, her head the head of a goddess. She saw all the stir and hubbub in the crowd, the jostling, the giving way before that chariot with the red wheels. She heard their shouts, the clamour of a people debauched and decadent, hailing the strong beast and cringing to its beastliness.

"Shabak! Shabak!"

"Lord of the Chariots!"

"Defender of Egypt!"

He was all leopard skin, golden harness, white teeth and glistening bare black arms. He drove his own

horses, fierce beasts who could use their teeth in battle, black, flecked with foam. He surged through the crowd and seemed to draw up on the crest of it like a galley on a wave, his eyes looking up at Tua the Princess, insolent eyes in a broad, shrewd face. Holding the reins in one hand, he plucked his great spear from its place at the side of the chariot and saluted the Daughter of Egypt.

It was a challenge. Even the crowd caught the swagger of it and understood. Was not the Princess's marriage gossip for all the markets, gateways and brothels? The crowd shouted.

"Let thy mate be a hero, O Daughter of Pharaoh!"

"No fop of a princeling languishing in a litter!" And Tua, standing there in the splendour of her beauty and her pride, looked down on Shabak and the crowd, the scorn of silence in her mouth and eyes.

"They ask for a hero," she said when the Ethiopian had passed, "a hero!"

"Make one, O my Queen," whispered Merkara at her elbow.

"Where in all Egypt can such a man be found?" she said.

And she tarried late on the roof of her palace, watching the stars begin to throb like silver lamps under a canopy of lapis-lazuli.

There was fear in the palace and fear in the heart of Pharaoh. Egypt was a broken reed. Wars and rumours of wars, rumours of great kings stirring in the East.

In the dead of night Pharaoh's messenger came to the palace of Tua the Princess.

"O Royal Daughter, Pharaoh summons thee."

It was Merkara who brought her the message.

"Did I not say that men were fools? They tremble like old women in the night."

Tua arose and bade Merkara dress her.

She went alone with the mes-

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senger, Merkara, and two of her Theban guards.

When the brazen doors of the great audience chamber clanged back before her she saw all things at a glance, as though the hall and its people were no more than a painting on a wall. Pharaoh sat on his throne between two pillars, an old man, grey about the lips, furtive, resting his head on his hand. Ptahmes the Prince stood frowning and biting his fingernails, the coward mocked by his cowardice. Roma, the priest of Ammon, and Nefcher, the Scribe of the Records, were whispering together behind the throne. Rahmes, the fanbearer, had the face of a scornful corpse. There were princes, lords, captains grouped between the painted pillars of the hall, and on Pharaoh's right hand stood Shabak, Lord of the Mercenaries, clothed in scarlet and shining like oiled bronze.

Tua made obeisance before her father.

"Pharaoh has summoned his daughter, and she is here."

The old man looked at her and then at Shabak.

"My daughter, there has been wisdom this night in the mouths of my councillors. The voice of Ammon has spoken. Behold, I, Pharaoh, am aged in years, and the sky over Egypt is not clear. Listen, my Royal Daughter, heiress of Egypt, in a short while thou wilt rule, and it has seemed good to us that a strong hero should sit beside thee on the throne of Egypt. And to-night the voice of Ammon has spoken and the god has chosen thy mate."

Tua stood tall and straight, a comrade for the gods, silent as the statue of a great king.

"What says my daughter?"

"Show me thy choice, O Pharaoh, thy choice, not Ammon's. And yet methinks he stands there at thy right hand."

Her breath came now, fire to her cheeks and to her eyes.

"Have I not guessed aright, O my father?"

And Pharaoh quailed before her, an old man, cynical and yet ashamed.

"It is even so," he said. "Prince Shabak, our lord of battles and most faithful servant."

Tua looked at them, at Pharaoh and the princes, and not one among them could give back a proud glance to her. Last of all she looked at Shabak standing there, huge and greatly cunning, the black blood of him in his eyes that burnt for the beauty of her woman's body. He did not flinch before her, for her scorn was as wine to a man who thirsts.

"So you would mate with me, my Lord Shabak?"

He showed his broad white teeth at her and made no obeisance.

"True, O Queen that is to be. I am no boaster, but all Egypt hides behind my shield. And you are Egypt."

She turned with passion on the lords and princes.

"Is there no man in Egypt brave enough to save me from the black beast of the south? Are ye all cowards? Shall a black man take the daughter of Pharaoh while the princes of Egypt slink like whipped curs behind the pillars of Pharaoh's chamber?"

Ptahmes alone broke the silence, sullen and pale with the anger of a coward.

"Pharaoh has spoken. Who are we that we should quarrel with the words of Pharaoh?"

Shabak lifted his head and laughed.

"The wise men have spoken, O Queen," he said.

Tua scorned him.

"Cowards have stolen the tongue of the gods. The heroes are dead in Egypt. My father, I bid thee good night."

She went out from Pharaoh's presence like a young lioness from a den of jackals, leaving silence and furtive eyes behind her.

The Heart of Tua the Princess

Again it was night, and Tua walked in her garden with the stars shining in the blue depths above the tufted palms. The heart of Tua was like the heart of a frightened and motherless child.

But the woman in Tua cried out fiercely against her doom, the passionate desire of a woman to love whom and where she pleased and to be loved by the man who should please her. She knew that she was to be the meat and incense of a sacrifice, she who carried in her the soul of a great king. She had no friend in the whole land whom she could trust save old Merkara, sitting there somewhere in the shadows.

In her anguish she called to her.

"Woman, mother whose breasts fed me, where art thou?"

Merkara had been sitting by a fountain where white rose petals floated in the moonlight. She rose, and her old face was fierce with pity.

"I am here, O Royal Daughter."

"Lay my head on thy bosom, O Merkara, for my shame is upon me, and there is no escape."

The old nurse fondled her.

"He shall not live!" she said, "for I shall mix poison."

"Thou!"

"Even so. I am cunning."

"My mother, never! Thou a murderess, for my sake, going to the great judgment. I love thee too well, O woman who gave me milk. Are we cowards like the men? It is I who must die."

Merkara uttered a fierce cry.

"Never! Are there not the gods? Have we not trusted too much in men? Listen. At dawn thou shalt speak with Ammon, thou, the Daughter of Egypt. And Ammon will harken. There shall be no false priest between him and my daughter."

Tua stood erect, arms spread, face turned to the moon.

"O Merkara, thou hast touched the soul in me. But are we not prisoners here?"

"Thou shalt go to the Sacred Lake at dawn, and I will go with thee. The Thebans are on guard. They love thee and hate Shabak."

And Tua stood as in ecstasy gazing at the moon.

"Ammon will hear me," she said. "Ammon, who loveth Egypt. I trust in thee, O woman who gave me milk."

There was not a sound from the great city, not the twit of a bird, not the rustling of a rose leaf, not a breath in the boughs of the acacias, when Tua the Princess went down to the Sacred Lake at dawn.

The Sacred Lake lay black under the blue night. Gardens surrounded it, gardens made rich and sweet by the temple slaves, watered with Nile streams splashing from aqueducts, so that there were great lawns and noble trees, even cypresses, ilxes, and cedars. The bosom of the night was full of the breath of flowers. Overhead a few stars still glimmered.

A broad, stone-paved path led to the lake, and ended there in a flight of steps.

Tua descended the steps till her sandalled feet were in the water. Then she bowed herself, took the sacred water in her palms, and let it run from them along her arms and into her bosom.

"I come, O Ammon, Great Father, to plead with thee at dawn."

A flat boat lay moored by the steps. There were paddles on the thwarts, and Tua stepped down into the boat and Merkara followed her. The old woman unfastened the rope from a bronze ring in the steps, took one of the paddles, and thrust the boat out over the dark water.

Neither Tua nor her nurse spoke. The great mystery was upon them. Out yonder in the darkness brooded the figure of god.

"He comes."

A sudden greyness showed in the east, and a faint light seemed to spread itself across the water. Old Merkara crouched and pointed, and then covered her face with the sleeve of her tunic. Something huge, and

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black, and strange seemed to rise out of the darkness, a formless mass in the gloom, towering like a great rock out of a calm sea.

Tua, standing, stretched out her hands in supplication.

"Ammon, Great Father, be not angry with thy daughter."

Then the dawn came, a splendour of silver light flowing like water through a wall of black clouds. It mounted, grew touched with crimson, while the clouded east towered into cliffs of lapis-lazuli. The water of the lake grew grey as glass, and, rising out of it, sombre, and strange, and huge, the statue of Ammon fronted the dawn.

Tua stood spellbound, waiting. A great awe was upon her, and upon Merkara crouching in the bottom of the boat. Would the god smile or frown? His face was still hidden, lost in shadows.

Then, even as Tua watched, a shaft of golden light struck full upon the face of Ammon. The god's tawny head seemed to top the clouds, serene, beautiful, infinitely calm, rising out of the blue gloom into the light. Its benignity and brightness were beyond all human understanding. Ammon smiled.

And Tua stood as in a trance, arms outstretched, eyes gazing at the great, calm god. The slanting sunlight flashed upon the golden uraeus on her forehead and glowed upon her robe of scarlet, but Tua did not move.

Presently Merkara heard Tua utter a sound like a woman waking from a deep sleep. The boat rocked slightly. The Princess was on her knees, stretching out her hands to the god's statue with a cry of gratitude and exultation. And Ammon smiled.

"Great Father, I thank thee. There is hope in my heart."

She made a sign to Merkara, and the old woman dipped the painted paddle into the still water.

"Ammon has spoken, O Merkara."

"Blessed be the dawn."

"I heard him speak, O Merkara, 'Life shall come by the Nile,' and he placed a vision in my eyes, and I beheld a great ship moving towards Thebes, a ship whose sail carried a golden sun."

"A ship, O Princess? But no strange ship may enter the Nile."

"That was my vision, O Merkara, the vision that Ammon gave me."

Towards evening of the same day Pharaoh sent for his daughter, and she stood before him in his great audience chamber, and before all the lords of Egypt. Shabak the Ethiopian sat on the steps of Pharaoh's throne and looked at her with the eyes of a conqueror.

"On the fifth night, my daughter, thou wilt take Prince Shabak as thy husband. Hast thou aught to say?"

Tua smiled a strange smile.

"What the god wills shall happen, O my father. Ammon has sent me a vision. I wait upon the will of the god."

They looked upon her curiously, and Pharaoh frowned.

"What was the vision, my daughter?"

"I may not tell thee. I wait upon the will of my god."

Shabak then shrugged his great shoulders and laughed.

"Thou shalt dream pleasant dreams, O Princess, when thou art in my arms."

She looked with level eyes at the face of his lewd insolence.

"He who sits before Pharaoh shall lick the feet of Ammon."

And the hearts of many men went with her when she departed.

That night Tua slept under an awning on the roof of her palace, and it was Merkara who watched, but towards dawn she grew weary and slept. And sleeping she dreamed a dream, in which Tua, the Princess, stood upon the knees of Ammon, clad in splendour, and with a shining hero at her side.

Then Merkara awoke, for someone was calling her.

The Heart of Tua the Princess

"Merkara, Merkara!"

"My lady?"

"The ship, the ship!"

Tua was standing by the parapet with the dawn upon her face. And Merkara rubbed her eyes, for there on the great river floated a strange ship, its bulwarks shining with brazen bucklers and a gold sun upon its sails, mimicking the dawn. Fifty oars churned the water, and the strange ship, the ship of Tua's vision, came striding out of the mist of the morning into the heart of the city of Thebes.

"Ammon has spoken."

"Some god or hero comes with the dawn."

The city was newly awake when the strange ship furled her sail and her rowers shipped their oars at the quay of the Lions. They made the ship fast to the quay, and much people came running, wondering and astonished, the idle news-mongers of an idle city.

These people saw a man with tawny hair like the hair of a lion step from the bulwarks and stand gazing at the towers of Thebes. He was a tall man, and very noble in his carriage, with the face of a hero, and the wet blue of the wild sea in his eyes. His cloak was the colour of turquoise, his harness of beaten silver, bright as the moon. He wore no helmet, and carried no arms, save the sword at his side.

"Friends," said he to the people who crowded near, "is this the City of Thebes?"

He spoke a strange tongue, and no one understood him, save a little old wrinkled man who had lost an eye. This old fellow pushed through the crowd, chattering like an ape.

"A sea prince, O Thebans, a lord of the islands. I can speak his tongue, the tongue of the yellow men of the north. What would you, Sir Stranger?"

He spoke insolently, but the man with the blue eyes looked at him, and he cringed.

"Show me the house of the Princess of Egypt."

"There are many Princesses, O lord, and many palaces."

"There is but one Princess, she whom the god showed me in a dream, the Great Lady of the land, with hair like midnight and eyes like deep water."

The one-eyed man looked frightened.

"Thou speakest of the Princess Tua, Heiress of Egypt, Royal Daughter of Pharaoh. I dare not show thee her house."

"Thou wilt dare it, slave, because the Sun God has sent me. Lead on. I take thee under the shelter of my sword."

So they came to the palace of Tua the Princess, and a great crowd followed, a crowd that murmured, though it knew not why. The captain of Tua's guard sat at the gate, and he spoke through the brazen bars.

"Who art thou who standest at the gate of the daughter of Pharaoh?"

The man with the blue eyes laid a hand on the old sailor's shoulder.

"Speak, slave, as I tell thee. I am Jason, Prince of the Islands. I would speak with the Lady of Egypt."

The captain of the guard laughed in the stranger's face.

"Thou cannot enter here."

And then he turned like a dog called sharply to heel.

"Open the gates, Maruma, it is I who order it."

Tua was standing there, Tua in all the glory of her beauty.

"Great Lady, I dare not."

"Open them. It is Ammon, the god, who speaks in me. This stranger is Ammon's messenger. Open the gates."

And Maruma, the captain, opened them and let the stranger pass.

They stood in the courtyard of the palace, under the shadows of the painted walls, the Princess of Egypt and this sea prince, this

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Achæan out of the blue north. And Jason gazed upon Tua, and she on him, and for a space they stood thus, he like a man lost in the strangeness of her southern beauty, she finding in him the man of a woman's dream.

Then Jason bent himself before her.

"Daughter of Pharaoh, am I not thy servant?"

She understood not his words, and yet the woman in her understood. She looked at him and smiled, and her smile was the language of the gods.

"Maruma, guard well my palace and let no one pass. And you, Merkara, come with me."

She made a sign to Jason to follow her, and, passing along a great gallery and through a pillared court, led him into her garden. There was a stone seat by a pool among the rose bushes, and Tua seated herself, but the Achæan stood before her and would not be seated. And Tua was pleased.

"How shall we speak, O stranger, you and I?"

She smiled and touched her lips, and Jason's eyes answered her with a look that needed no words.

Then Tua called Merkara.

"Is there no one in all my palace who can speak strange tongues?"

"There is Zaal, the little Sidonian."

"Bring her to me, O Merkara."

So Tua and Prince Jason gazed upon each other and made signs like two children until Zaal, the Sidonian girl, was fetched. She had been the daughter of a sea captain and had dwelt in the islands.

"Child," said the Princess, "canst thou understand the language of this stranger lord?"

Zaal turned her dark eyes on the Achæan.

"Thou comest perhaps from Crete, O Prince?"

And Jason's eyes smiled at her.

"Thou speakest my language, child. It is well."

So through the mouth of Zaal, the Sidonian maiden, he spoke to Tua the Princess.

"Behold, O Great Lady, Jason, a prince of the Achæans, a lord of ships, and a wanderer upon strange waters. Two months ago I chanced to lie in the Island of Crete, being weary of my wanderings, a homeless king of warriors and wild waters. One night, as I slept, the Sun God appeared to me and showed me a vision of the most beautiful woman in the world, even thee, O Princess. And the god said to me, 'Jason, get you down into the land of Egypt, for the daughter of Pharaoh will have need of thee.' And when I awoke, O Princess, I could not forget the lady of my vision, and I set sail and came to this land, even as the god bade me."

Tua looked at him softly.

"I, too, had a vision, O Lord of the Seas. I am in peril here, and helpless, and in my anguish I pleaded with Ammon my god. And Ammon smiled upon me and showed me a vision of a great ship upon the Nile, even thy ship, O Jason. So that my god and thy god are one. But tell me the Princess of thy vision?"

"It was thy very self, O Tua, even as I see thee now."

The woman in her exulted, but Jason spoke again through the mouth of Zaal.

"Tell me, O Princess, what is thy peril?"

"That is my peril," she said, starting suddenly to her feet and pointing through the rose bushes, "that black beast from the south who walks at the right hand of Pharaoh, my father. He has his hand on the throat of Egypt, and I——"

For Pharaoh himself was in the garden, an angry and hastening Pharaoh, brought from his palace by this breath of blasphemy. "A strange lord from the sea talks with the Princess in her garden." So Pharaoh hastened, an old man fiercely querulous, with a following

The Heart of Tua the Princess

crowd of lords, priests, and guards, and Shabak, Chief of the Mercenaries. Old Merkara and the Sidonian girl fell prostrate before him, but Tua stood facing her father, and Jason stood beside her.

"Daughter of Egypt, what is this?"

He pointed his staff at Jason, and Tua answered him with a proud throat showing.

"This, O my father, is Ammon's messenger, the hero, the great god promised in my vision. I saw his ship upon the waters, even before it had reached our city. And he, too, Jason, Prince of the Islands, is heaven-sent. Let him speak by the mouth of this Sidonian maid."

Pharaoh seated himself and gazed long on Jason, and Jason gazed on Shabak, and Shabak gazed on him.

"Let him speak by the mouth of the maid," said Pharaoh.

And Jason spoke even as he had spoken to Tua, and there was wonder and doubt upon the faces of the Egyptians. But Shabak folded his black arms and seemed to exult within himself, the strong beast sure of his own strength.

"This is a strange tale, O stranger. If false, thou art a blasphemy in this place. How canst thou prove the truth?"

Jason threw up his tawny head like the head of a lion.

"I come to conquer the doom, Great King, the doom thou hast placed upon thy daughter. Is that black swaggerer to mate with the Princess of Egypt? The god has forbidden it, and I am his messenger."

"Speakest thou of Shabak, our Prince and loyal servant?"

"I speak of the man who stands at thy right hand. When his head falls to my sword the god will have spoken."

And Shabak laughed.

"Thy god shall prove a liar, yellow head," he said, and there was a murmuring among the lords and princes.

Pharaoh held up his staff.

"Let there be silence. I will consider."

He sat, stiff as a temple statue, staring straight before him, and no man spoke. Then Ptahmes, the Prince, came and whispered in Pharaoh's ear. "If he kills Shabak, then are we free of the black terror. If Shabak kills him, to-day will be but as yesterday." And Pharaoh smiled, the veriest grey flicker of a smile, and gazed for a moment on his daughter.

Presently he spoke.

"This is too great a matter. I would lay it before my soul in silence. Ptahmes, guard well this place, and thy guards shall be the guards of the temple of Ammon. Daughter, I bid thee stay within thy palace. Stranger, since thou sayest that thou art sent to the daughter of Pharaoh by the god, thou shalt lodge in her palace, and in this garden thou shalt die if thy gods desert thee. Prince Shabak, go to thy house until my pleasure is made known to thee. Now, in the name of Ammon, let there be peace."

Prince Ptahmes lodged Jason in a stone pavilion in the midst of the garden, and set guards at all the gates.

Towards evening Zaal, the Sidonian maid, brought him a message.

"The Princess sends these words, 'Doth my lord desire anything—music or dancing-girls?'"

"Say to the Princess that I desire nothing but to behold the beauty of her face."

And with the dusk she came, and Zaal with her. The child's tongue spoke mere words. In Tua's eyes and in the eyes of Jason the great mystery was born.

"Shabak will seek to slay thee," she told him, "and I know not what is in the heart of my father. Shabak fights even in his chariot, and my lord is from the sea."

"I drove the horses of Argos when I was seven. Had I a chariot and horses and my helmet, spear and shield!"

"A chariot and horses thou shalt have, mine own horses, the fleetest and strongest in Egypt. Here is this scented-scarf. Let but the horses smell it and thou art their master. As for the spear and shield, I will speak with Ptahmes; he is our friend."

Jason looked on her with eyes of awe and of love.

"I fear nothing but thy beauty, O Princess."

"Then my lord shall fear nothing."

Jason slept well that night, but Pharaoh slept not at all. At dawn he called a scribe and sent a letter to Prince Shabak.

"Gird thyself. Drive forth and mock this stranger before the gates of my daughter's palace."

And Shabak laughed, and felt Tua in his arms.

In the palace of the Princess, Tua's white horses had been harnessed to a war chariot, and she had fed the beasts out of her own perfumed hands. Jason had broken fast and had armed himself when Tua and her women and maidens brought him his own helmet, spear and shield. And Jason kissed her hands.

"To-day the god shall prove me."

In her heart she prayed.

"Ammon, Father, suffer him to sit with me on the throne of Egypt."

All Thebes seemed to crowd to the great highway outside the Princess's palace, for strange rumours were abroad among the people.

On a broad terrace of the palace Tua showed herself to the people, lying under a purple awning with her fan-bearers, guards and women round her. Her calm was the calm of a great queen, but her heart was the heart of a woman. Her eyes watched the broad road leading down to the city; that road that was full of the life of Thebes.

And suddenly Tua's eyes seemed to narrow and her face to grow paler and yet more proud. She saw a tumult far away down the great

highway, a confusion, a swaying back of the crowd, a stream of dust and something that whirled its way through the scattering people. Two black horses were coming at a gallop, drawing a chariot with blood-red wheels. It was Shabak the Ethiopian, driving like a madman.

Driving furiously, he passed at a gallop in front of Tua's palace, through the screaming, scattering crowd. Where the great obelisk stood he reined in his horses, turned them and brought them back at a stately pace between the palms and sphinxes.

Then Shabak began to walk his horses to and fro in front of Tua's palace, and he lifted up his voice and mocked.

"Come forth, thou yellow dog, thou hero among the fishes! Why hidest thou among the women? Thy pale face is the face of a coward! Why hidest thou behind the petticoats of the daughter of Pharaoh?"

The crowd murmured.

"Shall the insult pass?"

And suddenly they saw the gates of the palace open, and two white horses drawing a chariot of gold came thundering through the crowd. Jason, the sea hero, drove them, glorious in arms, his tawny hair blowing from under his brazen helmet. And the people cried:

"It is a god—a god!"

Shabak shook his great spear and turned his chariot by the obelisk. The crowd gave back, pressing to the walls, for the highway was to smoke with the dust from the chariot wheels of heroes.

Now at the first rush of the charging chariots they swooped and passed like two ships, each man casting his spear. Shabak's spear touched Jason's left shoulder, but Jason's spear smote through Shabak's shield and wounded him in the arm. The Ethiopian grinned and cast away his shield, and turned his horses under the wall of the palace. But he was slow, three

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beats of the heart slower than Jason, for the white war horses were round and ready for the charge. Jason set them at the gallop and rushed on Shabak before his black steeds had gathered speed. And the white horses of Tua overcame the black horses of Shabak. Horses and chariot went over in the dust, and Shabak was flung whirling across the highway.

The people shouted aloud.

"It is a god! A son of the sun!"

But Shabak was up, dusty, bleeding and savage, and drawing his sword. And Jason leapt down from his chariot to meet him, glorious in arms, for the sword was his great weapon.

Tua had left her couch. She stood, resting her hands on the parapet, watching these two men meet and clash like lightning striking from a thundercloud.

Shabak smote like a giant with a club, but Jason leapt from his blows or parried them. He was smiling, and his face was the face of a sea king sailing his ship in a storm. And suddenly he put off one of Shabak's butcher blows with his shield, flashed in, struck with the point at Shabak's throat, and the Ethiopian went reeling.

Jason rushed and smote again.

Shabak's great arms were like the sails of a mill, his corselet all blood. Once again he rushed at the Achæan and tried to grapple him, and for a moment the two bodies were interlocked. Then the crowd saw Jason take Shabak by the throat and hurl him backwards so that he fell. And Shabak lay grovelling, a man who would rise no more.

A great shout went up from all the people, but Jason turned and saw Tua standing with arms spread, gazing down upon him with her midnight eyes. He raised his sword and helmet on high before her and exulted.

"O Lady of Egypt, our gods have spoken."

And the people shouted, "The gods have sent us a hero!"

So Jason ascended into his chariot and drove in through the gates of Tua's palace. Tua and her maidens met him, and the maidens threw flowers under the feet of the white war horses. But Jason lighted down from his chariot and kissed the hands of Tua the Princess.

"O Queen," he said, "thy beauty is more terrible than the strength of Shabak."

And Tua's eyes were the eyes of a woman who loved.

WARWICK DEEPING.



THE LOVER SINGS

"The lover . . . with woeful ballad made to his mistress' eyebrow.

There are two precious caskets:
Transparent, pearl-hued, white;
And oh! the gems within them
Are all my heart's delight.

They have no key or locking,
Their secret is just this:
That sometimes they will open
Beneath a lover's kiss.

And I am that glad lover
Whom love hath made so wise;
The caskets are her eyelids,
The gems, my lady's eyes.

ESMÉ WYNNE-TYSON.

The Sacred Snakes

By Warwick Deeping

"Eryx sprang on Milo like an angry god. He took the big man by the throat, and as Milo's arms relaxed and sank, plucked Sarnea from him, and, carrying her aside, he set her gently upon her feet.
"I keep what I love," he said to her."



LD Loredon, the dancing master, clapped his hands together, made a sign to the musicians, and stared fixedly at the group of girls.



"Clytis," he snapped, "begin."

A little woman in a sky-blue jacket and a white skirt striped with green, gave a quick smile of delight, shook her black hair, and ran forward across the alabaster paving of the court. In the shade of the colon-

nade opposite her sat the prince. He had come with his "exquisites" to spend half an hour in watching old Loredon's dancing girls rehearse for the great day of the spring and the new moon.

The dancing-master placed himself so that he could watch both Clytis and the face of the prince. The girl was his favourite. She was clever, charming, light as a bird, with shy, enticing eyes, and an impudent little face.

"Remember," said old Loredon, wagging a forefinger.

Clytis made a grimace at him. The flutes and the lyres struck up the wild notes of a dance, and the girl threw her bare arms heavenwards and stood on tiptoe, legs pressed together, a figure that thrilled and vibrated even in that pose of tense ecstasy.

"You are kissed," said old Loredon softly, smiling out of his fierce black eyes; "it is heaven."

So the girl danced, weaving the white spirals of her little feet over the polished pavement under the blue of the Cretan sky, with the white stones and pillars of the palace shining like snow against the purple of the hills. She glowed and grew warm, and the scent of her perfumed body was like the scent of a flower. Her eyes were languorous, mischievous. It was a dance of desire.

The other girls watched her. Some of them swayed their bodies slightly to the music. Now and again one of them gave a shrill, sweet cry. The sound of the flutes and the movements of the dancer's body were like love in the arms of life.

"Enough!" said old Loredon, suddenly.

Clytis whirled, stood poised, panting, gay, exultant, her eyes on the prince.

Minos smiled with the indulgence of a man who was no longer young. He had seen many butterflies and many birds, and the girl was a butterfly, beautiful to watch, yet something was lacking.

The prince's friends applauded. They were less critical, and the prince had smiled. Clytis fled back to the group of girls, jerking her hands, and kicking up one cheeky, white heel, a thing of pretty mannerisms and of much vanity. There was no other dancer like her in all Crete. The whole world told her so. Minos of Crete made a sign to the dancing-master, and Loredon approached the scarlet chair.

"My lord is pleased?" he asked.

"The girl has impudence and quick feet. What of this new dancer from the White Town?"

The dancing-master frowned, shrugged his shoulders, and gave a twist of his expressive mouth.

"You saw her dance, my lord, two days ago."

"There was no fire in it, Loredon, and yet—"

"She is not well."

"But I see her there, moping, looking at nothing with those big eyes of hers. A sick girl should be in her room."

"It is no bodily sickness, my lord. The jade may be in love—some boy she has left behind her."

"Bid her dance," said the prince, "and I will judge."

Loredon went back into the centre of the court, and looked at a girl who was sitting apart on one of the stone

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benches. She was a slim girl with a pale and haunting face, great midnight eyes, and wild black hair. Her lips were two threads of scarlet, and there were shadows on her cheeks, and under the long lashes of her eyes. She sat there, looking towards the sea with an air of fierce melancholy, her long white hands drooping over her knees, her shoulders slack and rounded. The whole soul and body of her looked relaxed and spiritless under the coquettish scarlet jacket and the white corsets that she wore. Her knees were pressed close together and the white flounced petticoat, embroidered with blue and green flowers, seemed to hang listlessly about her legs.

"Sarnea!" said Loredon sharply.

The girl looked at him with her mysterious eyes. They were dark, resentful, hiding a glow of pain.

"Dance."

She rose and came forward slowly, gazing at the pavement, yet even in the slackness of her thin and beautiful body there was a suggestion of wild grace, a passionate expressiveness that had drooped, but was not dead.

Loredon went near to her. He had the artist's kindness, in spite of his sharp tongue.

"It is the wish of the prince, my child."

"I cannot dance," she said; "there is no heart in me for dancing."

"What, and you were sent to us with such flame! Tut, tut! The prince is not easy to please. Please him."

She stood drooping.

"I will dance," she said, "but to no music save the music I choose. Send me that flute player."

Loredon beckoned him.

"Now—choose your whim."

"Flute player," she said, "know you the song of the Dead Moon?"

"I know it," he answered.

"I will dance to that song," said Sarnea.

She closed her eyes when the flute player began the song, and danced like a blind woman whose soul was heavy with anguish. There was a strange waywardness about her movements, as though she were blown hither and thither like a scarlet leaf. Sometimes she stood a moment, her hands at her throat, swaying, making those who watched her think that she would fall. Her face seemed to grow paler; even her lips were pale.

Clytis, who was watching jealously, began to mimic her and to laugh.

"Silence!" snapped Loredon, for the

prince was watching Sarnea with the intentness of an artist.

"This girl is like a sick bird," said someone at his elbow.

"Does her dancing tell you nothing, Sarpedon?"

"Nothing, my lord, save that she should go to bed with a cup of wine, and oil those limbs of hers."

"Then we will not waste it."

He made a sign to the dancing-master.

"Sarnea—enough."

The girl opened her eyes, looked vaguely about her, and went back to the stone bench where she had been sitting.

Minos called Loredon to him.

"That girl is a great dancer," he said; "she will be an artist, a flame, when that Clytis of yours is sucking the honey-pots. Find her another lover, Loredon, and you shall see."

II

THE young man was thirsty. He had walked far, and the sun was hot; his leather boots and the linen bands that bound his legs from ankle to knee were powdered with dust. He wore nothing but a loin-cloth of light blue linen. A brown cloak was strapped to the wallet he carried slung between his shoulders, and in his right hand he held a bronze-headed spear.

In the shade of a grove of cypresses sat an old woman, watching her goats. She had an earthenware pitcher on the ground beside her, for she had been selling milk to the brown sailors and the laughing, black-haired girls who had passed by from the seaport to the city of the prince. The woman was very old, with a bosom of shrivelled leather and a little beard on her chin; but her black eyes were bright and mischievous, the eyes of a woman who in her youth had been a coquette.

The young man drew near.

"Mother," he said, "I am thirsty. Will you sell me a cup of milk?"

She looked up at him quickly with her bird's eyes, for he was a stranger, and a proper man, and no man like him had passed along the road that morning. His brown body shone like bronze. He was tall and straight as a cypress. He had eyes the colour of the hill shadows, and his hair was a mass of close-cut, tawny curls.

"I will give it to you, my son," said the goat-dame, looking at him with the

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eyes of a woman, though her years were three score and ten.

She brought out a little brown cup with a pattern of red leaves, poured out milk from the pitcher, and gave the cup to the young man.

"You are a stranger, my son," she said.

He smiled, and half emptied the cup. His teeth were as white as the milk.

"I am a stranger, Mother. That is why I am so thirsty and find your milk so good."

"It is a day of strangers," she said, "the day of the Full Moon."

She pointed to the road, that swung like a yellow torrent down the hillside to the white sea-town and the blue of the sea.

"You came by ship?"

"No; on my feet—from the White Town in the west."

"So you are from the White Town," said she, taking the cup and refilling it, "and you go to the house of Minos?"

"You guess well, Mother."

"I guess what I see. Get you back, my son, by the way you came, and keep that golden head of yours outside the shadows of the prince's gate."

The young man looked at her questioningly.

"But I go," he said, "and why not?"

"There are no mirrors in the White Town, then, and no women?"

She was fierce—half mocking.

"No mirrors and no women?" she repeated.

"There are plenty of both, Mother."

"Then why did the women let you go?"

He set his spear in the ground, sat down at her feet, and smiled.

"I ran away. I am Eryx, the boxer. I ran away—because—"

"Because of a woman," she snapped, pointing a hag's finger at him.

"Did I not say you guessed well?"

The old woman considered him again, as a jealous girl might eye her lover.

"You handsome young vagabond! Yes, if I had been young—but perhaps it would shock you to hear an ugly old woman talk of her youth! Torch and moth, moth and torch! Hot blood and hands that grip! So the girl is up there?"

She pointed up the hill to where the house of Minos showed like a snow-cap against a purple hill mountain.

Eryx nodded.

"Sarnea the dancer," he said; "you seem so good at guessing that I'll tell it you. My Lord, the Lord of the

White Town, sent her as his tribute to Minos. And in sending her he has lost Eryx, his pet boxer."

"And for love of her you must thrust that tawny head of yours into the house of Minos on the day of the Full Moon in the month of the spring? The Snake Goddess has had no lover for a year."

Eryx gave her a quick stare.

"You flatter me, Mother."

"My son," she said, "Gulantis, the priestess, chooses the man to-day, the man who is to be the bridegroom and the lover of the Great Lady of Life. Were I Gulantis, and had I looked on all the young men, I should choose you."

Eryx laughed.

"What then?"

"You would be feasted; you would be given much wine, garlands, perfumes. You would be taken to the sanctuary, and there, my son, the sacred snakes would sting you and you would die. Before your death—other things would have happened. No little dancing girl, no soft kisses. The sunlight and the blue sky are good, and the arms of a dancing girl are pleasant. But perhaps you would choose the arms of the goddess and the crocus fields of the Golden Isle?"

The smooth face of Eryx had grown grave. There was a shrewdness about him, a gleam of the eye, an audacious tilt of the head that made him the master of the mere man of muscle. He looked obliquely at the old woman, scanning her with the eye of a boxer.

"You wonder why I tell you the truth, my son? What do things matter to an old woman? You came to me when the sun was warm, and the young man in you pleased me. That is all."

He leant forward and gripped her knee.

"Would the man in me please you if I turned back?"

She bent towards him and laid her hand on his head.

"If I were young—and the woman! So she is a flame and she burns you! Go up, my madman, and kiss her little white feet."

III

SARNEA stood at the window of the upper room, a little room that she shared with Erydne and Sapphire, two fellow dancers. This window was high up under the red-tiled roof of the house of Minos. Its open lattices were filled with

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crimson linen, and the sunlight, shining through one of these crimson panels, threw a glow like the glow from a lamp over Sarnea's pallor.

"Loredon is calling us," said the lilting voice of Erydne from the stairway.

Sarnea shrugged her lean and expressive shoulders.

"I am not coming," she said, with sulky passion. "Have I not told him that I will dance for none of these people?"

"My dear," said the other girl, "I have seen Loredon use his staff on the backs of such as you."

"Let him. But he will not do it a second time."

Erydne went running down the stairs, and Sarnea rested her round white chin on her two palms and looked down upon the life below. Her bare forearms, touching each other, were thin, but beautifully made, the arms of a woman who could be swift as a swooping hawk, fierce as flame. Her great, enticing eyes were sullen and unhappy, secret as night. She pressed her knees against the wall. Her face seemed to grow haggard.

"I am not a wild beast," she said, "to be threatened with a stick. I have no tricks for this crowd."

And such a crowd it was: a mob of brown men and of girls and women; a crowd full of wine and strong sunlight and the fever of the spring; a crowd that laughed and danced and rushed hither and thither with little gusts of romping, hot good-humour; a mad crowd; a crowd that threw flowers, pushed, screamed, made love, kissed, struggled, and sang. The courts and porticoes were full of it, and of all the flash and movement of its white limbs, its laughing eyes, and the interwoven colours of its clothes. It flowed through the gardens, flickered round the great trunks of the cypresses, and under the shadow of the planes. For it was the day of the Full Moon in the month of the spring. Love looked down out of the blue sky, and the birds sang.

"I have no lover," said Sarnea, "and I shall not dance."

Old Loredon entered the room. He was out of breath and angry, for it was a long climb to Sarnea's little room under the tiles, and his girls were waiting.

"So this is how you play upon my patience," he said, with the husky voice of his breathlessness and his anger;

"the whole procession is kept waiting because a wench has the sulks."

She did not move.

"I am ill," she said; "I cannot dance."

Loredon clapped his hands together, and gave her sarcasm, the gibes that he had learnt to use on a moody woman.

"We are thinking that the Lord of the White Town has played a trick on us. He has sent some wench who could foot it with yokels at a harvest-home—but Sarnea, the real dancer, he kept with him."

"Think what you please," she said.

"A cow, a young heifer, not fit to be matched with my Clytis or Erydne."

Sarnea gave a twist of her shoulders.

"Say that I am ugly—that I have a foot like a lump of dough! What does it matter?"

"Ye gods! And I have tried to be kind to the girl! Listen—you—"

But Sarnea was not listening. Her body had grown tense and alive like the body of a young animal that sees something that is greatly to be feared, or greatly to be desired. She leant forward, her two hands hooked over the stone edge of the window-sill, her forearms rigid, her head thrown back, her eyes wide open and at gaze. Her whole body seemed to quiver and to expand. Her breath came rapidly; her sensitive nostrils dilated with each breath.

Loredon stood astonished. He saw her raise herself on her toes and lean forward with her bosom resting on the frame of the window, her black hair falling over the crimson sleeves of her little jacket and over her white arms.

"Wait!" she said sharply.

She had seen a young man shoulder his way through the crowd and place himself beside the white pillar that stood in the centre of the Court of the Lovers. Three or four mischievous girls had fluttered round him like sparrows, chirping, throwing flowers in his face, and clapping their hands. The man smiled at them and shook his head. His eyes were searching for somebody, like the eyes of a lover searching for the woman he loves.

Sarnea turned and walked towards the door. Her eyes were shining, and her face had lost its haggard look.

"I will dance for you, Loredon," she said.

She went running down the stairs, arms spread, white gauze floating back over her shoulders like smoke from the red bosom of a fire.

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IV

A RING of laughing, mischievous girls had gathered round Eryx when Sarnea came out into the Court of Lovers. Old Loredon's dancers had joined in the game. The man was handsome, and he carried his head in a way that challenged a woman, as he stood there, resting one shoulder against the white pillar, his eyes amused and tantalizing, the sunlight shining on his brown skin.

Someone threw a flower in his face. It was Phoebe of the wicked red mouth and the slanting eyes, Phoebe who swayed her body at the hips when she walked and stroked the air with wanton little hands. The young man caught the flower as it fell, smelt it, dropped it unconcernedly on the stones, and smiled.

The other girls uttered mocking and delighted cries.

"Phoebe! Phoebe has her answer!"

"What insolence!"

"Adorable insolence!"

"Hail, big stranger, will you throw all our flowers on the ground?"

They pelted him, and he laughed, holding up one big brown hand, half in protest, half to shield his face. Onyx, who was famous for her languishing plumpness and her black eyes and the shadow of hair on her upper lip, spread intoxicating arms to him. Chloris pirouetted and threw him kisses. Eryx smiled at them all, like a big boy smiling at a lot of mischievous kittens. He neither retaliated, nor looked at any one of the girls as though her beauty had disturbed him.

His careless pose changed suddenly. His eyes went beyond the group of girls. His chin lifted, and his body seemed to poise itself like an athlete's body gathering itself for some swift effort.

"Sarnea!"

He saw nothing but Sarnea—Sarnea with her haunting face and passionate eyes, Sarnea in her crimson dress, Sarnea whose white hands and feet were wonderful when she danced. Chloris and Phoebe were pushed aside—ignored. He shouldered his way across the courtyard with the air of a swimmer breaking through the white surf for the blue of the open sea.

Old Loredon saw them meet, and the passion of it pleased him. It was youth losing itself in youth, fire and the wind, sunlight meeting the shadows of the hills.

They held hands, standing away from each other, arms tense and exultant as

though they wished to look and look across that little bridge of distance.

"Is it a year or a month?" she asked him.

"Seven days!"

"No more than that?"

Her great enticing eyes held him in their circles of soft light.

"I could not dance. They could not make me dance."

He bent, and drawing her two hands together, kissed the tips of the fingers and then the warm, soft palms. She pressed them against his lips, and her face was transfigured.

"My Eryx! But how did you come?"

He stood up and laughed his man's love into her eyes.

"Over the hills and through the valleys. The west wind blew me. I ran away. What does anything matter but this?"

"Nothing," she said, "nothing. And to-day I will dance to you as I never danced before. I will conquer them all—the prince, the people; they shall deny me nothing. Oh, exquisite day!"

He caught her in his brown arms and kissed her mouth.

"And I—I will strike men to the earth for love of you. No man will be able to bear my blows. Sarnea!"

Old Loredon was humming a tune and sidling towards the lovers.

"Be not angry with me, my children," he said, "but the day is about to begin."

He clapped his hands and blew a shrill note on his wooden whistle, and all his dancing girls came skimming to him—birds of rich plumage, with white arms for wings. Loredon smiled at them all.

"Clytis," he said, "you will dance the Dance of the Butterfly to-day."

Clytis pouted and looked sulky.

"Who is to dance the Great Dance? I shall be tired."

"Sarnea will dance it," said Loredon, licking a grim and humorous lower lip.

They exclaimed, they chattered, they began to storm at him.

"Sarnea indeed! And what has she shown us?"

"A nice mess she will make of it!"

Sarnea stood and smiled at them with a happy and exultant scorn. She gave Eryx a quick flash of the eyes, and a gesture of the hand that ordered him to be silent.

"They shall be jealous," she said to him, laying her cheek against his shoulder.

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der, "but they shall not be able to say a word. You will look at me—and I shall dance. Stand by the altar in the great Court of the Games. If the door-keepers ask you why you would stand in the court—say that you have come for Milo's crown of bay leaves. They say that Milo is growing fat and heavy."

"You shall wear that crown of bay leaves," he answered, kissing her black hair.

Old Loredon was blowing shrilly on his whistle and waving his right arm. These girls had to be treated like children.

"Enough. Get to your places. The procession is forming in the Gallery of the Lions."

"We will not dance with Sarnea," cried some of them.

"Then Sarnea shall dance alone! What—you silly jades—if Sarnea dances and the people find no pleasure in her dancing, will not Clytis or Phoebe be called for? Let jealousy put fire into your heels."

He beckoned to Sarnea.

"Come—you shall lead."

She kissed Eryx's shoulder, and fled away."

"I am loved," she said; "I shall dance."

V

THE Court of the Games was a broad, squared space, surrounded by walls of white stone, and containing an altar, a bull ring shut off by a timber barricade, and a sanded circle where the men boxed. The space about the altar was paved with slabs of polished stone, and this was the dancing place where the white feet of Loredon's girls were to glide over the smooth surface. The wooden benches, built in tiers against the walls, were crowded so thickly with people that many of the women sat on the knees of the men. There were two tiers of stone seats padded with scarlet cushions for the lords and great men of Crete. Coverings of white sail-cloth covered these seats. Jutting out between them like a bastion was the royal box, the seat of Minos, the prince, covered by a purple awning, its stone parapet festooned with flowers. Next to it stood a little building of painted timber that looked like a sanctuary, closed with folding doors of white and red, and carrying on its pediment the sacred horns—and the golden serpent.

Eryx was stopped at the barrier, at

the heels of Loredon and his dancers. The Master of the Games stood there with his guards, a swarthy, handsome old man, very richly dressed.

Eryx was held back with two staves across his chest.

"Who are you, my friend?"

"Eryx the boxer."

The Master of the Games looked him over with the eyes of a judge.

"We have heard of you, boy. You come from the White Town?"

Eryx smiled at him.

"True, sir. Put me to box with the great Milo, and I will not disappoint you."

The Master of the Games gave him a quick and searching stare.

"Ambitious!"

He made some notes on his tablets.

"Pass, Eryx. Wait—give him the gauntlets. Go and wait by the altar. You will find Milo there."

A bull had been brought into the ring, and the crowd was standing on the benches to watch the bull-grappling. It was a laughing crowd, a southern crowd—swarthy, gay, hot-blooded, loving the sound of a flute, the smooth ripple of a dancer's body, or the beautiful strength of well-matched men. The crowd was bored with the bull-grappling and the acrobats, men and girls, who leapt on the tame beast's back, turned somersaults over his head, or let themselves hang from his horns. Eryx had turned aside to watch these antics, but his eyes were searching for Sarnea. It was Sarnea who mattered.

"Enough, enough!" roared the crowd. "Let us have Milo—or the dancers!"

Eryx moved on towards the altar. He saw women looking at him, caught the flash of their eyes, the eyes of southern women who could delight in the strong limbs of a man. He was pointed at, for that tawny head of his was a strange fleece in such a flock, and his brown body was beautiful to behold. But Eryx was hardened to such crowds. He was aware of it as a man is aware of a tumbling, noisy sea when he is watching for the light in his lady's window.

He caught sight of Sarnea's crimson dress at the far end of the Court of the Games. Loredon's girls were grouped under the prince's balcony. The musicians were trying their instruments, and some of the girls were gliding to and fro, swaying, swinging their arms, skipping, to free the suppleness of their muscles. Clytis and Phoebe were sulking together. Sarnea stood apart, motionless, very beautiful, a glowing

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figure like a still flame burning on a windless day.

She saw Eryx and smiled. He spread his arms to her and turned aside towards the altar. A big man was sitting there on the altar base, a huge, smilingly arrogant, stone-headed man with a leopard skin over his powerful shoulders. He had a sunken, lipless mouth, a snub nose, wide nostrils, and grimly comic eyes. It was Milo the boxer.

He looked at Eryx from forehead to feet, slowly, at his leisure, and with a good-humoured truculence that had palsied many a strong man.

"Good morning, Yellow Head."

Eryx smiled at him.

"Good morning, Leopard Skin. We seem alone here."

Milo's eyes gave a twinkle.

"There is a reason for that, youngster. I am an unpopular person. It seemed that there would be no meat for Milo to-day."

"It is tough meat, though it is young," said Eryx, looking the big man in the eyes.

Milo grunted.

"Tough meat needs pounding. It is made softer and more juicy."

The flutes were sounding, and Loredon was marshalling his dancers. Hundreds of eyes were turned on Sarnea. Men and women pointed out the girls to each other, discussing each dancer's fame, arguing for their favourites, criticizing blemishes.

"There's Clytis. She's the best of the whole posy."

"And she knows it too well. For a maddening little mischief give me Phoebe."

"I'm always in love with Onyx," said a lean sailor with a hungry mouth.

"Onyx is too fat."

"Not—for me," said the sailor; "but who is that girl in red—that girl who looks as though she could claw like a leopardess?"

"Sarnea, the new dancer from the White Town."

Most of the men were looking at Sarnea. Her stillness, the way she stood apart, the glow of her, the burning exultation in her great black eyes, held them wondering. Even Minos was watching Sarnea as though no other dancer mattered.

Milo sucked his thin lips.

"Ha! there's fire," he said. "Here's something to burn a man!"

Eryx glanced at him with a fierce lift of the chin.

"It is a sacred fire. Not to be touched by such hands as yours."

The flutes began to play a jaunting, rippling melody, and old Loredon clapped his hands.

"Clytis!"

It was the dance of a butterfly, and Clytis fluttered to it in her dress of filmy blue. But she was sulky, out of temper, and the charm of her audacity was gone. She was jealous of Sarnea, who was jealous of no one on that day of the Full Moon, and the dancer's little soul lost itself in half peevish mannerisms. She provoked no pleasure, and no applause.

Loredon felt the flatness, the futility of it, and let her dance for less than a minute.

"Enough."

He waved her back to the benches, and looked at the prince. The prince nodded and pointed to Sarnea.

Loredon waved his arms, and the flute players and the harpers who were watching him struck up the great dance, the dance of love and the spring. For a moment Sarnea did not move, but stood rigid, arms outstretched, looking towards Eryx with eyes that dreamed. The music was soft, slow, and plaintive, with no passion in it as yet, the music of the dawn, gradual, wondering, like the eyes of a child.

Suddenly Sarnea began to dance. It began as a mere drift of the body, a flowing of the limbs, a gliding over the polished stones with a lightness that was the lightness of vapour. She moved like a little cloud or a flame carried by some invisible hand. Her eyes were half closed, her head thrown back, so that her white throat showed. She was ecstasy in the shape of a woman.

The crowd watched and was silent. Old Loredon was smiling, smiling like the cunning artist to whom every subtle movement suggested an emotion. Sarnea had a soul, the soul of a woman, the soul of life and of love. She could tell the tale of all that might happen to a woman and tell it in those movements of her limbs and body, and in the haunting beauty of her expressive face.

Loredon clapped his hands, and the music changed its temper. The half-plaintive ecstasy of it died away; it ceased to dream; it awoke, became life and desire under a blue sky in the blaze of the spring sunshine. Love had opened her eyes. And Sarnea!

She, too, was awake, and moving with wonderful swiftness in a beautiful abandonment of soul and body. She swayed, she exulted, she seemed to lie upon the

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air with great flowing movements of delight and joy. Her great eyes blazed. Every finger-tip was vibrant with passion. There was love in the sinuous sweep of her arms, in her caressing hands, in her beautiful bosom, in her exultant throat. And always she looked at Eryx, Eryx who loved her, the man for whom she danced.

The music rushed to a passionate finale. Sarnea whirled, gave one light leap, and stood still. Her arms were spread, her face was like the face of a rhapsodist; she panted, and glowed in that triumphant poise. The great crowd rose like a sea, roared, swayed, waving scarves and hands. It rained flowers. Sarnea had conquered them.

Eryx had fallen on his knees by the altar and was saluting her as he would have saluted a goddess. He was still kneeling with arms outstretched, when he saw a man leap towards Sarnea, a man wearing a leopard skin—Milo the boxer. He seized on Sarnea, his great arms gripping her round the body, and lifting her, held her at arms' length above his head, her face to the sky, her black hair streaming.

"A prize—Prince!" he cried. "A prize! I claim her!"

VI

The crowd shouted.

"Milo! Milo! She is mate for Milo!"

Then a hush fell. The crowd saw a young man leap forward, a young man whose brown body was beautiful in its fierceness and its strength.

Eryx sprang on Milo like an angry god. He took the big man by the throat, and as Milo's arms relaxed and sank, plucked Sarnea from him, and, carrying her aside, he set her gently upon her feet.

"I keep what I love," he said to her.

"Conquer—or I shall die," she answered him.

He turned and faced Milo—Milo who had never been so balked or handled in all the days of his prime.

"She is mine, you mountain of fat," said the younger man.

Milo grinned at him and swung his hands.

The crowd was on its feet, shouting.

"Let them fight for her!"

The sex spirit was roused in that southern crowd. The women screamed, clung to each other, pointed at the two

men. No day of the Full Moon had known a greater tumult.

"Let them fight—let them fight!"

But the men were fighting even while the women screamed at them. Neither they nor the crowd waited upon ceremony, nor upon the prince's nod, nor for the voice of the Master of the Games. They fought where they stood, upon the polished floor where Sarnea had danced, and they fought for Sarnea and the madness of her beauty.

The crowd hushed itself, but the hearts of the women were with Eryx.

The men were like bull and leopard. Milo crouched, seemed to bring his head between his huge shoulders, his feet widely straddled, his two fists in front of his face. It was his boast that one blow crippled his victim, the second broke him. Blows did not matter to Milo; he took them like a rock.

But here was a new man for him—a leaping flame, a panther, a brown youth who was swift and fierce and very strong. Eryx was as cool as snow on Ida, yet he was mad with a madness that was inspired. He had fought men like Milo, men who smote and gave their faces to be smitten; bull-men, stupid, heavy, insensible to pain.

Eryx was swift and cunning. He had learnt blows that were difficult to parry, fierce upward swings, sharp jabs; and he could dodge and smother blows with his supple arms and shoulders. He played like light round a rock, feinted; challenging Milo to hit him.

Milo struck, punched the air, and was struck in the ribs a hammer blow. He grunted and smashed out, but Eryx was away.

The women screamed.

"He fights as Sarnea dances!"

Eryx flashed in again, smothered Milo with baffling blows, lured him to counter, dodged, came back, and caught him with a fierce swing to the throat. The big man was soft there. He went back three paces on knees that shook, and his mouth gaped for air.

And Sarnea smiled. The fear went out of her eyes. The fear of Milo and his might.

That blow on the throat had shaken the big man. He had been hurt, and hurt as no man had ever hurt him before. He lost his phlegm, his bovine patience, the grimness that could wait, and came charging at Eryx like some angry Polyphemus, and Eryx, head thrown back, eyes smiling, seemed to drift from his blows like smoke from a fan. Milo was panting; his mouth

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askew, his forehead a baffled, savage frown.

The men who had shouted for Milo looked glum.

"He cannot touch him!"

"It is like a bull trying to toss a shadow."

Then Eryx leapt in when the surge of the big man's strength was failing. Milo stood like a rock, a futile mass, bruised, taking blows and giving none. And presently the rock began to totter. Milo's knees slackened; he stooped; his head sank lower; and Eryx, standing away for a moment, measured him for the blow of mercy. It was given, and it was the last.

Milo went down, and lay where he had fallen. The crowd roared, and the voices of the women were for Eryx.

"Youth wins."

"Sarnea is his."

Sarnea had run to him and thrown her arms about his neck. They clung together and kissed, and the women envied Sarnea, while Eryx was envied by the men.

VII

INTO the thick of this moment of youth and of life came the sound of a brazen trumpet, and the great crowd stood still. A strange silence fell. Some god might have turned all these people to stone, changed their clamour to a sudden silence under the blue Cretan sky. Not a man or a woman moved. Even Minos sat rigid on his chair. The group of dancers were like the figures in a picture; Milo lay where he had fallen; Eryx and Sarnea were still in each other's arms.

The trumpet sounded a second time, and still there was silence. Spring had come, the great goddess walked upon the earth; the doors of her sanctuary were open. Eryx, standing there with Sarnea's white arms about his neck, saw the painted doors above the sacred balcony swing back and disclose the figure of a woman. She wore a mitre of gold upon her head, a gorgeous dress of purple and gold, and a belt set thick with precious stones. One of the sacred serpents lay in coils upon her shoulders, and the reptile's head rested between her breasts.

It was Gulantis the priestess, Great Lady of the Spring and of the Full Moon, a woman with strange tawny eyes and the face of beauty, yet evil. There was disdain and there was hunger in those eyes of hers; her nos-

trils were cruel, so was her sensual mouth. She seemed to look out upon the world and upon all the people like some sleek and hungry leopardess whose tawny eyes searched for a victim.

The people bowed themselves before her, a little grudgingly perhaps, for Gulantis was not loved. She was too fierce, too disdainful, a woman of mystery with ugly shadows over her soul. There had been whisperings in the great house of Minos—tales of wild sacrilege, of flagrant passions, of dead youths who had been embraced before they died. Crete looked askance at Gulantis and the yearly doom she gave.

Sarnea had turned and was resting her head against Eryx's shoulder, and the eyes of the two women met. Eryx felt Sarnea's body quiver and then stiffen against his. Her right arm went round him, and clasped him with a sense of passion and of fear.

"Hide your face, my beloved."

He looked into Sarnea's eyes.

"What is there to fear?"

And then he remembered the words of the old woman of the goats, and his heart seemed to stand still. Gulantis was looking at him with those strange and tawny eyes of hers, the eyes of a leopardess who beholds her prey.

He stood helpless, wondering, conscious of Sarnea's warm body pressing against his, life trying to turn him from the path of his doom. He saw Gulantis raise her staff and point at him, while the black snake made a strange hissing between her breasts.

"Behold the chosen one—he whom the great goddess loves!"

The Cretans looked upon Eryx and upon Sarnea—lovers who would never love—and a whimper of pity rose to the lips of the women. A murmur ran round the packed benches.

Gulantis's eyes grew cruel. She raised her staff.

"Who murmurs against the Sacred Sacrifice? Take him, Guards of the Court."

Then the woman in Sarnea defied the woman of the sanctuary. She left Eryx and ran forward towards the balcony of the prince, her great eyes blazing, her arms outstretched.

"He is mine, O Prince. Forbid this thing, and it shall not happen."

But the face of Minos gave her no comfort. This law was a law of Crete, and he could not alter it.

She stretched out her beautiful arms to him.

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"I ask but pity, for he is going to die, and he is my lover."

Suddenly she heard the voice of Eryx, the voice of a man who struggled with other men, and she turned and saw him in the hands of the palace guards, one brown arm reaching out to her as they dragged him away.

"Sarnea! Sarnea!"

She flew to him with a face of tragic pity and despair, caught that brown arm of his, and held it against her lips.

"Oh—my love——"

The guards thrust her aside, and she fell on her knees there by the altar, and covered her face with her hands.

Some of the women were weeping.

"She prays. She is broken."

"A bird with wounded wings."

But Sarnea was neither praying, nor was she broken. The flame of her love had turned inwards and lit up the passionate guile of the woman who fights for her man. Sarnea was thinking. She had a vision of Gulantis—cruel, dissolute, inflamed by the strength and the beauty of Eryx, a woman to be met and faced with guile.

The crowd still watched her. They saw Sarnea uncover her face, rise, and walk with drooping head towards the sanctuary where Gulantis sat on her painted chair. Sarnea knelt down below the sacred balcony and bowed herself till her black hair touched the stones.

"Oh, Great Lady, I have sinned," she said. "What must be—must be. My pride is in the dust."

Gulantis smiled down at her, the smile of a queen scorning a slave.

"Girl, the goddess shall find you another lover."

But Sarnea's eyes were blazing under her cloud of hair.

VIII

SARNEA stood at the window of her room, a white Sarnea with her face between her hands. She was thinking, while the full moon voyaged in the blue-black sky, and made the great house of Minos a labyrinth of brilliant whiteness and of dense shadows. Southwards beyond the dark heave of the hills the sea edged the horizon with a streak of silver. The great house was very still. The feasting and the love-making were over, and the people slept.

Not so Erydne, curled on her couch against the wall. She was the gentlest of the girls, a shy, soft-eyed thing,

warm-hearted, easily touched, a quick creature who opened her arms to pity. She had been watching Sarnea, watching her for hours, lying very still, with her heart full of compassion, while the more prosaic Sapphire slept. Sarnea's bleak wakefulness fascinated her. She made a black silhouette against the moonlight, a tense figure that did not move, and made no sound. Erydne would have wept, had she been in Sarnea's place, but Sarnea did not weep.

Erydne could bear the silence of it no longer. She wanted to go to Sarnea, to comfort her, to touch with tender and compassionate hands. She slipped out of bed, and going softly across the room, crept like a little mouse into the other girl's silence.

"Sarnea!"

Sarnea started, but she did not turn her head.

"Why are you not asleep?"

Erydne put an arm about Sarnea's body.

"I could not sleep."

"Speak softly. You are not like the others, Erydne."

"Dear Sarnea, I too am in love, and my love is happy. Therefore my heart goes out to you."

She felt Sarnea's body quiver.

"In three days he will be dead," she said; "but he will live for three days. And—I too have three days in which to live—and to think."

"Yet—he has loved you."

"Does the exultation soothe me? He is mine, and in my heart—I defy the gods."

"Sarnea!"

"It is true. I stand here and think in the house of Minos, and my thoughts strive towards life. I tell you, Erydne, my love can be as strong—yes—and as cunning as the wisdom of the gods. I defy them."

Erydne was frightened.

"But, Sarnea——"

Sarnea turned suddenly and caught Erydne in her arms. She was as fierce and as strong as a man, and her eyes looked into Erydne's.

"Will you lie—for my sake? Would you keep silent?"

"Sarnea, I am afraid."

"And you say that you can love! And I—I have no friend! I ask so little."

"What can I do?"

Sarnea grew gentle.

"Listen. Swear that I never left the room to-night. Swear, if any man asks you, that you saw me lying in my bed."

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"If you would lie in your bed, Sarnea—I could swear it."

Sarnea smiled.

"Blessed be the wit of a woman! That is easy. And you swear to me?"

"On my love, I swear it."

They kissed.

The two girls lay down in their beds, and then Sarnea rose again, and bent for a moment over the sleeping Sapphire, but Sapphire was weary and sleeping like a child. Sarnea stole away down the stairs and into the deeps of the great palace where even the guards of the Treasury slept after the feast of the Full Moon. Sarnea met no one in the maze of the great house. It was a place of moonlight and darkness, of deep breathing and stertorous sleep, a house that had drunk much wine and whose slaves lay like the dead in the porticos and galleries. Sarnea did not hurry. She went cautiously and silently on her bare feet, gliding along walls, passing from pillar to pillar, pausing often to listen. In the portico of the Great Court she had to step over the bodies of men who slept, sprawling against each other like dead men in a house that had been sacked.

She came at last into the broad gallery that led into the Court of the Sanctuary, and she could see the yellow flames burning low on the altar in the centre of the court. There might be guards here, or some servant of the sanctuary watching the doors, and Sarnea crouched and went forward in the deep shadow of the wall. She passed a slave who slept huddled in a corner, covered with an old cloak; but nothing moved or was awake in the court save the feeble flames on the altar. Sarnea's bosom heaved, for she had held her breath while she passed the slave.

The double doors of the sanctuary were open and Sarnea went swiftly across the court till she gained the sanctuary wall. A quick, crouching run brought her to the steps. She lay down here, and crawled, moving so slowly that she seemed hardly to move, till her eyes were above the level of the topmost step. She lay there, curled like a snake.

The sanctuary resembled a long gallery, with screened doors opening from it on either side. The walls were hung with rich hangings that touched the floor. At the far end of this gallery stood the sacred pillar of white marble veined with red. On either side of it were the sacred horns, fashioned of pure gold. Nearer still stood the altar, and

below the altar was a great brazen tripod covered with scarlet cloth—the tripod of the Sacred Snakes.

Sarnea saw all this with eyes that forgot nothing. So silent was the place and so mysteriously unguarded, that a boldness grew in her and she crept in over the threshold. A great hanging lamp of gold threw a circle of light upon the sacred pillar, the altar, and the tripod of the serpents; but the rest of the sanctuary was very dim, and made yet dimmer by the screens and hangings.

Sarnea rose on her knees, and from them to her feet. She crept close to the hangings, ready to dart behind them at the sound of footsteps or of a voice. She had reached the first screen, and in touching it, a little bell of silver, sprung on a bracket of copper wire, broke into a sharp jangle. Sarnea had not seen that bell, for it hung on the other side of the screen.

Four dancer-leaps carried her to the door. She threw herself down upon the steps and looked back into the sanctuary. Three black, sickle-shaped objects had raised themselves from the sacred tripod. They swayed to and fro and hissed, and there was a writhing of black bodies in the light that fell from the lamp and from the fire on the altar.

Then Sarnea understood. The sacred snakes were the guardians of the sanctuary.

IX

SARNEA returned to her room in the palace, meeting no one, and without adventure. She had been absent less than an hour; and Sapphire was still sleeping; but Erydne was not asleep, for she sat up when Sarnea entered. Sarnea went to her and slipped into Erydne's bed.

The girl clasped her in her arms.

"I was afraid—and I remained awake."

Sarnea lay still.

"I have been cooling my heart in the moonlight. Put your mouth close to mine, Erydne. I am a stranger here, but you have been three years in the house of the prince?"

"Yes, three years."

"Tell me—for I would hear it again—all that will happen to my love."

Erydne lay close, holding Sarnea in her arms.

"I will tell you. For three days he is guarded in the White Tower. He is fed and lodged like the prince; they

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anoint his body with oil and perfumes; musicians play under his window; women bring flowers and scatter them about the tower. Then on the evening of the third day he is taken in a great procession to the Court of the Sanctuary. There Gulantis waits in the sanctuary. To her is given. The doors are closed. Everybody goes home and there is silence."

"Where are the guards posted?"

"There are no guards. No chosen of the goddess has ever sought to escape."

Sarnea gave a little shiver of anger.

"Then death comes. And how?"

"They say that the sacred serpents bite the bridegroom and he dies. They say that the dead are found smiling. For three days Gulantis watches over the body, and the body remains clean and sweet, because it is sacred. On the fourth night the doors of the sanctuary are opened, and the dead bridegroom of the goddess is taken to a cave in the mountains and there buried."

Sarnea lay very still, but there was exultation and a wild hope in her heart.

"I had thought to die with him," she said, "but how can I contend with such a woman as Gulantis?"

Erydne sought to comfort her.

"It is the will of the gods, even though it is hard. You must not die, Sarnea; you are too beautiful, and there is no dancer like you in all Crete."

And Sarnea slept, in spite of the fever of her thoughts, lying in Erydne's arms and dreaming that she was in the arms of her lover.

In the morning she arose and went to wash at the stone bench in the Court of the Women. She was very calm, and went lightly on her feet, and the girls who crowded into the court were astonished at her calmness. They had expected a tragic Sarnea, a woman who hid her face and who avoided the eyes of a crowd.

Clytis twitted her.

"Sarnea has slept well. She forgets easily."

Sarnea answered her gently.

"Who am I that I should strive with the gods?"

Clytis was silenced.

When Sarnea had washed herself she went down into the garden to gather flowers. Bulbul, the negro, guarded the gate of the gardens, a grizzle-headed old man with a face that smiled. He kept a tame snake in a basket; the snake was a great favourite of his, and black with his own blackness. And Sarnea stopped to speak with Bulbul.

"I would gather a handful of flowers," she said.

"You may gather a bosom full," said Bulbul, showing his white teeth.

Sarnea saw the snake in its basket inside the doorway of Bulbul's cell. She admired it.

"It is my own colour," said the negro, laughing, "and it has not the tongue of a woman."

The snake put up its head, and Sarnea bent over the basket and began to make a queer, soft song. The snake's head rose higher; it uncurled itself and flowed out of the basket. Sarnea held out an arm. The snake climbed up it, and wrapped itself about her shoulders with its head lying on her bosom.

Bulbul was amazed.

"It loves you," he said; "you must know the soul of a snake."

"I have charmed them, Bulbul. I was a charmer of snakes before I was a dancer. This is a sweet creature."

She stroked the serpent's head.

"How did you come by it?"

"I had it from the Valley of Snakes," said the negro. "In the ancient days there was a sanctuary there, and they say that some of them escaped. Now the valley is full of them, and they are very fierce."

"Where is the valley?" Sarnea asked him.

"Beyond the mountain. It is half a day's walk. You go through the fields and then take a path by the stream. It leads through the woods. You would know it because there is a ruined olive press on the edge of the woods."

Sarnea smiled at Bulbul.

"I will go there some day. Now, sweet, get back into Bulbul's basket. I must gather flowers."

"The best flowers are near the water cistern," said the negro. "I love those who love Denke, and they are few."

Sarnea gathered her flowers—white lilies, purple iris, roses—and carried them through the palace to where the White Tower stood. There were guards at the door of the tower, also women who had brought flowers; for it was accounted lucky to bring flowers to the god of the spring. Some of the women recognized Sarnea, and pitied her, because she had won her lover and been won by him, only to lose him to Gulantis and the goddess. Gulantis was not loved.

The women whispered together.

"How calm she is."

"Alas! but it is sad to say farewell."

"And their love was a great love. She

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danced for him and he fought for her."

Sarnea laid her flowers at the foot of the tower and went her way. She sought out old Loredon and found him sitting in the portico of the musicians, an old man thinking his thoughts in the sun. His eyes softened when he beheld Sarnea.

"Master," she said, "my heart is heavy. I would go out and wander in the fields, alone."

"Go," he answered her. "Would that I were young, and I would strive to comfort you."

"There is no comfort for me, for what is there left on earth that comforts me? My love goes to the golden isles, and—I—die."

"Not so. You will live to dance and delight us, when the pain has passed."

"You are old," she said, "and I am of such a nature that I will not suffer this pain to pass. It shall eat out my heart and kill me. Then I shall be at rest."

She left him and Loredon shrugged his shoulders. He had seen much of the world.

"They all speak like that," he reflected; "but love returns with the spring. Have I not loved a hundred women in my time, and loved them well? And life has been good."

No one saw Sarnea leave the palace. She went out by way of the gardens and through the cypress groves to the fields, moving like spring on flying feet, wrapped in an old cloak that Erydne had given her. The sun was hot in the fields, upon the corn and upon the vines, and the olive trees gave no shade. But shade came to her and the pine woods in the hills, a gloom of mystery, a silence as of the dead. She had found the path that Bulbul had described to her, the path that led over the shoulder of the mountain into the Valley of the Snakes.

X

It was noon when Sarnea came down through the pine woods into the valley, an upland valley, stony, deserted, yellow with heat, a strangely sterile place that had been cursed by the gods. There were aromatic shrubs growing between the stones, and now and again a cluster of anemones painted the ground purple or red. A little spring bubbled out at the edge of the woods, but soon left itself in the dry ground, and Sarnea stopped and drank at this stream.

Below her she could make out the grey and broken walls of some ruined building half hidden by wild fig trees and silvery-leaved shrubs. Her eyes darkened as she looked at it, and her face seemed to grow thinner. Something told her that it was an accursed place, a place of fear and of creeping and poisonous things, where no man dared set his foot.

And Sarnea was afraid.

Yet fear was but another creeping and poisonous thing to be met and tamed. She had come to this wild place to try herself, to prove whether she was still the sorceress, whether her power still held. For beyond the fear and the peril of it flickered a wild hope, a hope that fed upon the fierceness and the anguish of her love.

She left Erydne's cloak lying by the spring, for the perfume of Erydne was not the perfume of Sarnea, and unfastening her leather sandals, she went down towards the river, taking care not to wound her feet against the stones, lest the smell of blood might hurt the charm. A pile of squared stones still stood in front of the river; it had been the altar of the sanctuary, a sanctuary that had been overthrown by the anger of the gods. And then she saw how truly Bulbul spoke of the place, for the ruin was a nest of serpents. They lay basking in the sun, coiled in warm corners, or trailing over the sun-bleached stones.

The brutes were startled. They raised their black heads, and looked at the woman-thing who came so boldly into the sanctuary. The place was full of their hissing. Black bodies began to flow and writhe among the stones and through the scrub.

Sarnea was white as linen—her nostrils pinched, her eyes conscious of death. It was the great moment of her passion and of her sacrifice. If she could charm these creatures, there was hope for Eryx, hope for her wild dream.

She leapt swiftly on to the altar, and stood poised. From all sides the black snakes were moving towards her, and their bodies made a dry rattling among the stones.

Sarnea began to make a strange, soft whispering with her lips, a sweet and gentle sound like wind in the grasses by a river. She swayed her body, and let her arms move in slow, flowing, caressing gestures. The rattling of the stones ceased, black heads swayed.

The swaying of her body and beau-
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tiful flowing motion of her arms grew bolder and more passionate. The whispering changed to a soft, moaning melody that kept time with the movement of her body and her arms. Now and again she uttered a plaintive cry, spread her arms, and stood very still.

Then was danced the strangest of all dances, the Dance of the Snakes. They gathered thick about the altar stone, swaying their heads in time to the swaying of Sarnea's body and to the little plaintive song she sang. When she stood still they remained like creatures carved in stone, save for their bright eyes and darting tongues. One huge black serpent, the master of them all, laid his flat head on the altar stone and seemed to go into a charmed sleep.

And Sarnea exulted. She was the mistress of these creatures, and they had no fear of her, nor she of them. She took the big black serpent in her hands, placed him about her body, and stepping down from the altar, moved softly among the polished coils. The serpents put forth their heads and licked her hands, her dress, her ankles, and Sarnea knew that her power was great.

Then she put them to sleep, making slow, downward passes of her hands and singing a song that an old witch woman had taught her in the hills above her home. She unclasped the great snake and laid him upon the altar, and, stepping clear of the black coils, returned to the fountain where she had left her sandals and her cloak.

XI

SARNEA came in late to table, and it was Erydne who noticed the brightness of Sarnea's eyes. The other girls had gone out into the portico, or were laughing and talking to the men who had gathered below the windows. Erydne had tarried for Sarnea, and Sarnea was hungry.

She had touched no food since day-break, and she ate with dainty fierceness, looking straight in front of her with eyes of inward fever. Erydne hovered awhile like a shy bird, but Sarnea's silence seemed to enclose her in a cage.

Erydne made to gain the other girls in the portico, but Sarnea awoke and called her back.

"I have been in the woods all day. Has ought happened here?"

"Nothing."

"If you are awake to-night—watch Sapphire for me, till I return."

Erydne nodded.

"Will it be long?"

"An hour. The hour after midnight. If you are asleep, I shall wake you."

"And if Sapphire should wake?"

"Even Erydne can tell some little tale—for Sarnea's sake."

"Yes; Erydne can do that."

When midnight came Sarnea went down again into the deeps of the great house of Minos, a house that slept, and with an easy mind. Crete was Queen of the Seas, and there were no walls about her towns, no guards at her gateways, no watchers upon the hills; but men came and went as they pleased, and even the slaves had liberty. Guards held the White Tower and the gallery of the treasure chambers, but Sarnea did not pass that way. She came unhindered to the Court of the Sanctuary, a square of moonlight bounded by the shadows of its high walls and porticos. The doors of the sanctuary stood open; the fire burned steadily; the great lamp was lit.

When Sarnea came forth from the sanctuary, her face seemed to shine like a white flame. She did not walk, but danced, and danced to the music of her exultation, sweeping the air with her hands. Greatly exulting, she swept through the porticos and across the Great Court, moving to the music of her triumphant tenderness.

"They are mine," cried her heart; "I have conquered them, and they shall serve me."

Erydne was awake, and Sarnea bent down and kissed her.

"I love you, Erydne."

"Sarnea, your lips are like fire!"

"And so is my heart, dear."

She slept, for she had walked far and had suffered much emotion, and she was weary.

Next morning, when the day was still young, Bulbul found her at his gate, and asking for flowers. She bent over Denke's basket and caressed the black snake, whose tongue licked her hand.

"Take what you please," said Bulbul.

Sarnea gathered her flowers and went straight to the White Tower. She was the first woman to bring flowers that morning to the Beloved of the Goddess, and the two guards at the gate recognized her. Sarnea stood there with bowed head, and eyes that wept, and the guards, being warm-hearted fellows and touched by her beauty, pitied

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her, for men are as wax under the eyes of a beautiful woman.

They whispered together, and the taller of the two drew near to Sarnea.

"We are good fellows," he said, "and it is hard to see a woman weep. Would you have sight of Eryx?"

Sarnea's wet eyes blessed him.

"For the last time, good friend, and to speak one word before he goes to the Golden Isles."

"Be quick," said the man, "and return speedily, or we shall be in trouble. Go straight up the great staircase."

Sarnea flew like a bird, her flowers clasped against her bosom. The stairs wound in a great spiral within the tower, and at the top of the stairway she found the open doorway of a stately chamber; yet though the doors were open, the space was closed by a wonderful net of golden wire.

Sarnea saw a man lying prone on a couch, his face buried on the pillows, a man broken and caged, spoiled of his love and his life. Sarnea drew close to the golden net and called to him.

"Eryx—my Eryx."

He sprang up and stood gazing, and his eyes looked black in his haggard face. Sarnea's lips were against the net, and she spoke to him with the mouth of her love.

"Quick! The guards have pitied me."

Eryx uttered a strange cry, and swayed forward against the net of gold like a man who had drunk much wine.

"Sarnea!"

Their lips met, with the strands of the wire between, and their two bodies were pressed against each other.

"Listen," she said in a whisper, looking into his eyes. "I will not tell my secret for fear of listening ears. Would you still live for me, my Eryx, or die and go to the Golden Isles?"

"Sarnea! Why should I have to die, when all my love cries out for you?" he pleaded.

She laid her hand against his mouth.

"Be careful. You speak too fiercely; but, oh, my love, it may be that I can save you, and if I saved you we should have to fly into the wilds and cross the sea to some strange city—unless Minos pardoned us."

"I will go as a beggar into the land of the barbarians," he said; "but for you, Sarnea, such a life would be rough and hard."

"Am I not a wild thing, and you are my mate?"

He laid his hand against her bosom.

"Let me live and be free—even if

it be for a night and a day. And yet—what hope is there?"

"Listen," she said. "When they bring you into the sanctuary and close the doors, stand before Galuntis like a man who is deaf and dumb. Stand and wait, and let no amazement show upon your face. If Galuntis plucks out her dagger it is you who must take it from her. If blood is spilt, then may we all die."

"But—Sarnea!"

They heard the voice of one of the guards calling from below.

"The time is up. Come down."

"Have hope," she said, kissing him again through the net of gold. "I go."

XII

ON the night of the sacrifice Sarnea hid herself in the sanctuary behind the hangings that covered the wall. The thing had been easy, for she had dared the awe of the place and the mystery of that sacred night, seizing her chance to glide in through the open doors, and to become no more than one of the votive dresses that the devout had piled in the little vestibule. She had insinuated herself behind the hangings, crawling like a snake over the rich stuffs and dresses. She had chosen the right-hand wall, for there were no doors or screens on that side, and the hangings, carried on bronze brackets and poles of cypress wood, left a little space between the fabric and the wall. She had wrapped her feet in two pieces of brown cloth, so that the whiteness of them should not show above the leather sandals.

And Sarnea waited, passing her time in ravelling a little hole in the hangings, using the silver bodkin from her hair. The night of the sacrifice was a night of great rejoicing; she could hear the sound of flutes and a sound of singing in the courts and porticoes of the palace.

Then came the pealing of trumpets, and Sarnea stood very still. They were taking Eryx from the White Tower and were bringing him to the Sanctuary, and bringing him with music, and dancing, and a waving of torches, a scattering of perfumes and of flowers. The people had been feasting and drinking much wine. Lovers had chosen their mates. Women who lacked children walked in the procession with the men.

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The snakes on the altar set up a sudden hissing, and a bell clanged in the sanctuary. Sarnea had an eye to the hole she had made in the hangings, and she saw Gulantis come and stand before the altar, a very splendid Gulantis in her gorgeous robes, mitre on head, her jewelled stomacher flashing. Yet the face was evil, for Gulantis was flushed with wine. Her tawny eyes looked red and heavy with a dull, sensual light. She kept moistening her red lips with her tongue, and Sarnea hated her, with a hatred that was more pitiless than death.

The noise of the flutes and voices drew very near. The flare from a hundred torches poured through the doorway and lit up the dim entrance to the sanctuary. The crowd was chanting the Song of the Spring, and strewing the court of the goddess with flowers.

Sarnea heard the cries of the women.

"Farewell, O happy youth! Farewell, blessed lover!"

And then she saw Eryx thrust in through the open doors, a garland of flowers upon his head and a cloak of purple covering his body. The doors were closed behind him. The women's voices rose again in one last cry of, "Farewell, O happy youth, farewell!" Then a great silence fell. The crowd was leaving the sacred court, and Sarnea heard nothing but the noise of many feet brushing upon the stones.

She looked at Eryx. He had mounted the steps and was standing there with bowed head, a lifeless figure of youth, hopeless, slack, unstrung, and her heart exulted. He had not forgotten her warning. She saw him as the simple youth, struck dumb with awe and fear, unable to lift his eyes to the figure of Gulantis.

Gulantis was speaking.

"Welcome, Eryx, chosen of the gods. Welcome, sacred lover."

He stood like an oaf before her, and Gulantis smiled.

"Thou art afraid, O chosen one! Pluck up courage and look at me. Am I so ill favoured? Are my eyes dim and my lips shrivelled?"

Eryx made no sign, and Gulantis drew near, looking upon him with her tawny eyes, and caressing the air with her hands.

"The boy is shy," she said, "afraid of a woman! Gulantis is but a woman. She is less terrible than the goddess. Lift up your head, man, and let her see your eyes."

The three sacred snakes were stirring upon the tripod, their heads like three black sickles when seen against the glow of the fire. There was a slight movement of the hangings on the wall, a ripple that seemed to pass along them like the stirring of the water when a fish glides near the surface. Gulantis saw nothing of all this, of Sarnea slipping out from behind the hangings and waving white and sinuous hands towards the sacred snakes.

XIII

THE eyes of Eryx betrayed him, for Gulantis saw him look past her, and not with a look of fear, but with a sudden wonder and the undigsembled tenderness of a lover. Sarnea was dancing slowly in front of the tripod, and the beautiful and seductive movements of her body and her arms were swaying the heads of the serpents as a wind sways the long grass.

Gulantis flashed about and stood amazed, a woman whose soul was clouded with passion and the fumes of wine. Sarnea had begun to sweep in great circles about the tripod, and to utter a little moaning song, very strange and plaintive. Gulantis stood gazing upon Sarnea and the snakes.

Then a quick, fierce cry came from her, and she stretched out a hand towards the tripod.

"Kill! Kill!"

Eryx had run down the steps and shut the wooden bolts of the doors. He leapt back up the steps and stood poised like an athlete, watching the two women, knowing that his man's strength must wait upon Sarnea's word.

"Peace, children."

She kept up that little moaning song, and Eryx saw the snakes rise on the tripod and lick her hands. They were her children and her servants; and even as he watched her triumph he saw Gulantis rush forward, uttering strange cries. She waved her arms, seemed to grasp and clutch at her power over those three black beasts—the power that Sarnea had taken from her.

For the space of the taking of ten breaths the two women stood facing each other across the tripod, contending in a tense battle of wills; but it was the soul of Sarnea that triumphed. She drew back step by step, beckoning to the snakes with a soft bending of her fingers into the palms of her hands, and the snakes followed her.

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XIV

GULANTIS's right hand had gone to her belt, where a little dagger lay in a gold sheath. She drew the bronze knife, and went towards Sarnea; but when Eryx would have leapt in, Sarnea waved him back.

It was Sarnea who clapped her hands together and cried fiercely: "Kill! Kill!"

Then happened the strangest thing of all, for the sacred serpents of the sanctuary turned upon Gulantis before the altar and slew her as she stood. She was like one palsied, overcome with a great fear, unable to move by reason of the living bands that swathed her legs, and swarmed upwards towards her arms and throat.

Sarnea's voice called.

"Quick! They have tasted blood!"

She had taken down one of the sacred dresses from a peg beside the altar, a dress from a great petticoat of gold cloth hooped out about the hips, and flowered with tissue of purple. It was such a dress as the goddess wore in the paintings upon the walls of the house of Minos. Sarnea slipped into it, fastening the laces with swift fingers. Taking a veil of gold tissue from another peg, she covered her head with it, and held out a hand to Eryx.

"Come."

Gulantis lay dead before the altar, the snakes still wrapped about her body.

"Open the doors, and close them when we have passed."

His eyes questioned her.

"What am I but the goddess? I am leading you out of the house of Minos to the Golden Isles of the West!"

The great crowd had gone, but in the porticoes about the sacred court a few suppliants still knelt, women who besought the goddess to give them children, or girls who had not won the man they loved, and these women and girls beheld this most wonderful of marvels. They saw the doors of the Sanctuary open and a woman come forth holding Eryx by the hand, a woman dressed in a dress of gold, and with a gold veil over her head. She seemed to move like light across the court, a blessed figure of beneficence and beauty, while Eryx went with her like a man who dreamed.

"It is the goddess—the goddess herself, passing with her beloved to the Isles of the West!"

Sarnea knew the way that led from the Court of the Sanctuary, past the Portico

of the Lions, to the sacred cypress grove and the Gardens of the Blessed. These suppliant women saw the golden glimmer of her vanish into the shadows, and her beloved passed with her into the night. They lifted up their hands and gave thanks with awe and exultation.

"We have seen Her! She has walked the earth to-night. Our prayers are heard."

The two lovers were running hand in hand through the sacred grove where the moonlight flooded in among the cypresses and made great shadow-patterns on the ground. Sarnea had heard the wondering cry of the suppliants, and her heart exulted. She was thinking, scheming, contriving as they ran through the moonlight and the shadows.

"O my love, my love," she said, "you are saved!"

They tarried there a moment, clinging together in a sudden ecstasy of joy and tenderness, mouth against mouth.

They passed on into the fields and through them to the pine woods on the slope of the hill, and here Sarnea's vision came to rest.

"Listen, O my love," she said. "Here, in the woods, the goddess vanishes, and Sarnea goes back to the house of Minos. This dress of gold must be hidden in some hole in the ground, and the hands of Eryx shall contrive it."

"You are jesting," he said, "while I am thinking how we can escape from this island."

She drew his head down to hers.

"There would be no escape. We should be like hunted things—hiding in the woods and wastes and waiting for the end. No; I have a tale that shall be told, a song that shall be sung, and the evil in the heart of Gulantis shall prove to be the blessing of the gods."

She told him how everything should happen, what he should do, and what he should say, and Eryx was amazed at the simplicity of her vision.

"You are an enchantress," he said, holding her in his arms.

"Nay; I am—love," she answered, "and love is greater than all the gods."

XV

SARNEA put off her dress of gold, and stood before Eryx in the little frock of the dancer.

"Kiss me—before I go."

And Eryx kissed her adorable mouth, her eyes, and her hair. He held her fast and was very loath to let her leave.

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"If this adventure should miscarry?"

"It will not miscarry," she assured him, "for I think that I am inspired tonight. Come down boldly at dawn and tell your tale in the house of Minos."

He suffered her to slip out of his arms, but went with her to the edge of the pine wood, and there Sarnea made him turn back. She fled away down the hillside, re-entered the gardens, and, passing through the sacred grove, came on swift and noiseless feet to the Court of the Sanctuary. The portico was still full of suppliant women who whispered together of the wonderful thing that they had seen that night, and Sarnea joined herself to this crowd of women and knelt with them.

"O Holy Mother, forgive me. Thou hast taken my lover, and I was angry, but I have seen Thee and my heart is humbled."

An old woman turned to Sarnea.

"Who art thou, who speakest thus?"

Sarnea knelt with her head bowed almost to her knees.

"I am Sarnea the dancer," she said, "and the goddess has taken Eryx my lover from me, to take him to the Golden Isles. Did I not see them pass in the moonlight, and the heart died in my body?"

A little milker of goats kissed Sarnea, and Sarnea kissed her in turn, and rose from her knees to go to the Court of the Dancers.

She had reached the doorway of the room under the tiles, when she heard the little yawn of a girl who was awake, yet weary of watching. Erydne was sitting on her bed. She had heard Sarnea's footsteps on the stairs, and ran to her and took her in her arms.

"Sarnea!"

Sarnea let her head rest upon Erydne's bosom, though there was joy and a great tenderness in her silence, and not the anguish that Erydne thought to comfort.

"Where is Sapphira?"

"She is not here. She has a lover."

"And I——"

Erydne drew Sarnea to her bed, and Sarnea let herself lie in the child's arms.

They lay mouth to mouth, and Erydne began to speak a whisper. She had heard of the wonderful thing that had happened; the news of it had spread through the house of Minos, how the goddess had been seen leading her beloved to the Isles of the West.

And Sarnea lay very still.

"Yes; my eyes beheld it," she said,

"and my heart is humbled. Put me to sleep, Erydne, that I may forget, for the pain will come with the morning."

XVI

THE sun was still low in the sky when the slaves who were sweeping the great court of the palace saw a young man in a cloak of purple come and seat himself on the steps of the altar in the centre of the court. The slaves stood and looked on him with amazement, for they knew him as Eryx the boxer, a live man who should be dead. One of them called the master of the household, who was walking on the northern terrace.

"Master, here is a marvellous thing—a man who has escaped the sacred snakes."

The master of the household went down into the great court, to see what wild tale the fool was telling. He found Eryx sitting on the steps of the altar.

"But, my friend, you are dead!" said the master.

"Feel me," said Eryx, holding out a hand.

The slaves had come crowding round, and were listening to all that passed between Eryx and their master.

"Let me be taken before the prince," said Eryx. "I have words for his ears. Shall I speak of sacred things before slaves?"

"Before the prince you shall go, my friend."

"And I would charge you, sir, seeing that you are a man of authority in this house, go to the sanctuary and set guards about it, and of the thing that you shall find in the sanctuary you shall bear witness before Minos."

"You speak with a lofty tongue, young man."

"The breath of the goddess is in me," said Eryx.

Some of the slaves had run away to spread the news, and the rumour blew like a wind through the house of the prince.

All the world left its work and hurried to the great court—a dark-eyed, excited, southern crowd moving through the porticoes and galleries under the Cretan sky.

They flowed about Eryx in the great court, surrounded him, so that he was like a man in a human cage, a man to be gazed upon with wonder, a man who touched the great mystery and came back to the world of men.

The Sacred Snakes

"Make way! The prince comes! Make way!"

The people flowed apart, and through this alley-way walked Minos of Crete. With him came the Lord of the Palace, the Master of the Records, certain of his wise men, and the servants of his chamber.

Minos looked upon Eryx with great steadfastness.

"Young man," he said, "speak to me and to the people. Some strange thing has befallen you."

Eryx stood erect, and with arms spread, spoke before the Cretans and the prince.

"Sir, I speak of the marvels that have happened to me. All the world knows how I was taken to the sanctuary and how the doors were closed. Gulantis stood there before the altar and the tripod of the sacred snakes, and Gulantis spoke words of evil, and of a sudden a woman appeared, coming as it were from the flames of the altar, and I saw that it was the goddess, and I was afraid. The face of the goddess was angry. She stretched out her hand and bade the snakes slay Gulantis, and they slew her where she stood."

Minos held up his hand.

"Wait. Sarpedon, go to the sanctuary; search out the truth there. Now, man, speak on."

A murmur passed over the crowd, and it stood hushed again—waiting.

"O Prince, when Gulantis lay dead, the goddess took me by the hand and let me out of the sanctuary. We came out into the court and into the light of the moon."

There were cries from the crowd.

"It is true."

"Did we not see it?"

Minos made a sign to the people to be silent.

"The goddess led me into the sacred grove and into the Gardens of the Blessed. A strange stupor was upon me, and I walked on air. The face of the goddess was veiled, but her voice was gentle, and her hand burnt mine

like fire. She led me through the fields and up into the high woods, and there, in the darkness, my stupor increased. She seemed to become like a figure of flame, so that my eyes were dazzled. And then the goddess spoke to me—words of great gentleness. 'O mortal man, thou art free. Because of the sin of Gulantis I give thee back thy life. Go down and tell this to Minos, my servant. When the dawn comes, thou shalt wake.' Then sleep came upon me, and I slept till the dawn, and, waking, came here to do her bidding."

The crowd would be silent no longer.

"Gulantis is dead."

"The sacred snakes killed her."

"And Eryx lives!"

"And Sarnea—what of Sarnea?"

Returning gravely into the fever of the crowd came the Lord of the Palace and the Master of the Household.

Minos' eyes were turned to the Lord of the Palace.

"Speak. What have ye found?"

The Cretan lord spread his hands.

"It is as the young man has said. Gulantis is dead, and the sacred snakes still lie upon her body."

The crowd in the great court went mad, and the women led the madness. They rushed upon Eryx, passionate and joyous creatures who crowded to kiss him and touch his hands.

And then a voice cried:

"Sarnea!"

The crowd took up the cry, and its emotion burst into flame.

"Sarnea! Sarnea!"

She was there. The shouting, swaying mob made way for her, and she came through the crowd with the slow steps of a dancer, the steps of a dancer who dreamed.

"Sarnea!"

Eryx saw nothing but Sarnea. All else was blotted out from before his eyes. He leapt forward to meet her and swept her up in his arms, and even the cold eyes of Minos smiled at that embrace.

WARWICK DEEPING.

Competition Corner

We again make an offer of two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the competitors who send in the titles of the four stories they like best in order of merit. The prizes will be awarded to those whose cards most nearly coincide with the votes of the majority of the competitors. Address, "Vote," THE STORY-TELLER, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate

Hill, London, E.C.4, and send in by January 3, 1922.

This month we have pleasure in awarding the first prize of Two Guineas to:

MRS. S. JONES, 8, Devonshire Road, Middlesbrough.

And the second prize of One Guinea to:

MISS A. M. HODGSON, 1, Stafford Road, Brighton, Sussex.

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THE GHOST KNIGHT.

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THE GHOST KNIGHT.
BY WARWICK DEEPING

"Deceit, deceit," cried the swallows, skimming the water, and gliding about the gray tower in the meadows.

"Deceit, deceit." And their wings kissed ripples upon the broad, still moat, or flashed in the sunlight amid the aspen trees.

And upon the hills the pine woods were dark under the sunset, with streamers of crimson vapour afloat across the west.

When Gareth of Avranches reined in his horses before the rough hostel that stood by the wayside in the valley, with a few hovels to keep it company, an old woman came out to him, and bobbed to him for service. She had a cold, white face, with a skin like wrinkled vellum, and her eyes gave never a twinkle as she looked up at the knight.

"A night's lodging, lording?"

Gareth cast a glance over the rotten thatch, and at an old sow that came grunting out by the hostel door. There would be more to be gathered than spent in such a hovel; nor did the old woman's hard face please him.

Therefore he pointed with his spear to the tower that rose gray amid the aspens across the meadows, with the sheen of its broad moat catching the gold of the western sky.

"Whose tower is that—yonder, dame?"

The woman crossed herself and shook her head.

"My lord would not lodge yonder," she said, making a mouth of mystery.

"And—why not?" he asked.

"There is a curse upon the place, lording; the wailing of the woes is heard in the tower."

Gareth gazed at the place under his hand.

"The sun shines on it," he said. "Who is the lord of the place?"

"A year ago Sir Rene ruled there," said the woman, "but he is dead. And then his eldest son took the father's place; but he, lording, died also. Then Guillaume, the second, ruled, but death soon took him, and he was seen no more in this world. Now Raymond—the third—is left, and Yvette, his sister. But it is not a month since Messire Guillaume died, and the curse is there still—they say."

"How did they die, dame?"

"No man knows, lording. They went, and were seen no more. That is all."

Gareth looked at her keenly, as though he mistrusted the woman's tongue.

"I would hear more of this," he said curtly. "Such happenings are not to be

missed," and he left the woman standing in the road, and passed on over the meadows toward the tower.

It was growing dusk when Gareth reached the bridge over the moat, and blew his horn as a summons. The place seemed very dolorous and silent, with its dark windows and its gray walls that were cold now against the twilight.

The bridge was lowered, the gate opened, and Gareth rode in. A breeze stirred in the aspen trees, so that they chattered at his back, and Gareth, peering about him in the dusk, looked for the porter who had opened the gate.

A shadowy figure stood stiffly against the wall. It waved a hand to the knight, but did not speak. And Gareth passed through into the base court out of the house.

Now, from the doorway of the hall, a girl came forth in a robe of some black stuff; her hair had the colour of a full moon seen through mist, and her eyes looked dark in her pale face. She stood looking at Gareth for a moment as though she had learned to live with some shadow of fear haunting her. But the cross that he wore in his surcoat seemed to lighten her distrust.

"Welcome, Messire," she said, "if you would lodge the night with us."

And Gareth, when he had dismounted, went to kiss her hands.

"I am on the homeward road," he said, "laying a hand over the cross on his coat. It is many months since I have seen the orchards of Normandy."

So he followed Yvette into the house, marvelling at the colour of her hair.

Gareth sat down to supper in the solar that evening with the girl and Raymond, her brother, an old man serving them, and the old man was dumb. A great sadness seemed upon the house, and upon Yvette and her brother, the sadness of those who grieve, the dread of those who watch continually for some horror in the dark. Yet they did their best to be debonair and courteous for Gareth's sake, questioning him as to his adventures, and how the Christians fared in Syria, and how the wars went against the Saracens. For Gareth had come over sea from Acre by Cyprus and Crete in a Venetian ship. He had ridden through Lombardy and Genoa into Provence, and so northwards towards the Loire.

They had talked of the Kings, Philip and Richard, when Raymond of the Tower spoke of a neighbour who had taken the cross.

"Malvo de la Montagne was with certain lords who sailed a year ago," he said, "you two may have met—yonder—in Syria?"

Gareth thought a moment, and then shook his head.

"I remember no such name."

"A big man with a dark forehead, and four big teeth as large as hazelnuts. We knew him here, and had good cause. But that is our own tale."

Gareth remembered no such man. But he saw Raymond look at Yvette, and the girl flushed hotly, and hid her eyes from them.

For Malvo de la Montagne had sought her in love, roughly, and her brothers had taken the man and beaten him with their sword-belts, so that he had gone home bloody, half naked, and savage as a wounded bear. And the next that they had heard of Malvo was that he had taken the cross, and gone, perhaps, for penance, to fight in the holy wars.

So they went to their rest that night, Gareth still wondering at the curse that seemed to hang over the house, at its silence and emptiness, and at the sad and watchful faces of the girl and the man. There seemed no servants in the house, save only the dumb porter, and one old woman. And Gareth lay down on a truss of straw in the hall, and drew his cloak about him in the darkness and the silence.

The Norman had not slept an hour when he awoke suddenly, like a man called by a trumpet cry. Starting up on the bed, he laid a hand on his sword, and sat there listening, with a vague, ghostly sense of fear. A moon had risen, and the beams thereof came slanting through the narrow windows of the hall. Yet the silence of the night covered everything for the moment, and Gareth wondered what had awakened him.

He was putting the sword aside, as though he had been roused by nothing more than a trick of the brain, when a strange cry thrilled up out of the silence of the night, a cry that seemed to make the moonlight quiver as it poured into the darkness of the hall.

The cry held in one long-drawn note, to break at last and fade into nothingness, like the smoke from a candle that wavers into the night. Then, again—all was silence. Yet Gareth, who was no coward, felt his hair bristling, and longed to hear something moving in the house, for he remembered what the woman at the inn had told him.

He was rising from his bed when he heard a voice calling outside the tower, a thin, faint voice, that seemed to come from beyond the moat. And so clear were the words it uttered that Gareth heard them in the hall.

"Follow, follow, follow. Blood of thy blood calls thee, Raymond. Accursed art thou, if thou follow me not. And Rene, thy father, shall abide in hell."

The voice died away, and in its place Gareth heard the sound of movement in the tower above. The door at the end of the hall swung open; the figure of a man stood in the dark entry, and by the glimmer of his body Gareth knew that he was armed. The Norman had taken down his shield from the wall, and stood ready and alert for what might happen.

The figure moved forward, till the moonlight was upon his face, and Gareth recognised the lad Raymond, his face white as swan's down, his eyes like the eyes of one walking in his sleep. He had a shield upon his arm, and a naked sword in his right hand. Nor did he so much as notice Gareth, as he moved down the

How Gareth, Knight of Avranches, Dispelled the Curse Upon the Castle of Raymond and Yvette, and What Came of It.

The meadows had been ghastly enough, but this moonlit wood seemed full of whisperings and shadows, and strange shapes that moved. The chequer of silver light that fell here and there upon the brown mast and thin, wiry grass made the grim gloom around appear deeper. The figure on the white horse beckoned ahead, following a narrow way that climbed the long slope of the hill. And Gareth held on after it, feeling like a man in a land of ghosts, and wondering whether he would be struck down from behind some tree.

The way grew less steep of a sudden, yet Gareth, peering from underneath his helmet, found that he could no longer see the rider on the white horse. There was nothing but the straight alleyway between the trees, and a blur of moonlight ahead of him, as though he were coming to an open space amid the pines.

hall, and unbarred the door leading into the court. And Gareth, who followed him cautiously, and without a sound, saw him cross the court towards the stables as though to saddle and bridle a horse.

The lad came forth in due course from the stable, leading a black horse by the bridle, the moonlight shining upon the flagstones of the court, and upon the mists that rose from the moat. Gareth, keeping within the shadow of the hall, saw Raymond walk his horse towards the gate. And so wrapped was the knight of Avranches in watching this midnight sally that he did not hear footsteps crossing the hall.

A hand touched his shoulder. He turned with a start, and a grip of the sword to find the girl Yvette standing there, a cloak covering her white shift, her feet in sandals, her hair falling about her like so much fawny smoke.

She seemed silent, tongue-tied, dumb for the moment as with some great fear. Her eyes looked into Gareth's, like the eyes of some wild thing pleading for life.

"Messire—my brother—?"

Gareth pointed his sword towards the gate.

"He has gone?" And even in the moonlight, he saw the pupils of her eyes dilate.

They heard the sound of a chain falling. Yvette ran out, with one backward glance at Gareth, her eyes said "Follow!" And the Norman followed her and the gleam of her hair.

But Yvette went faster than the man, for love winged her heels. She disappeared under the dark entry of the gateway just as her brother swung the heavy gate open. Gareth heard her give a low, eager cry, and when he came to them Yvette was clinging to her brother, and looking up passionately into his face.

"You shall not go," she said. "No, on my life, you shall not."

Raymond, who had dropped his horse's bridle, was trying to thrust the girl from him.

"I will see the end of this," he said. "Let go, child; would you have Rene, our father, left in hell?"

But Yvette still clung to him, fastening her arms again upon him, when he had forced them away.

"It is a devil's trick," she said; "no warning from God. Geoffrey went as you are going, and came not again; and Guillaume followed Geoffrey. They were bewitched—taken— And I shall lose you—Raymond—also!"

The lad was a brave lad, though his face was white and his voice husky. He put his sister's hands away from him, thrust her back against the wall, and caught at his horse's bridle. The gate stood open, and he was in the saddle, and ready to spur across the bridge, but a stronger hand than his took the peril from him that night, and turned the horse into the court.

Raymond was out of the saddle, hot with a boy's anger, but Gareth caught him in his arms.

"Softly, lad; I am not here to quarrel. But I have a wish to have a hand in this."

He let Raymond go, seeing Yvette ready to plead once more with the stiff-necked youth.

"Child," he said to her, "what is it that you have to fear? Who is it who comes and calls to you—at midnight?"

She had gone to Raymond, and put an arm about him, but she looked at Gareth with eyes that shone.

"God knows, Messire!" she said. "But there is some curse over us, some power that has lured my father and my brothers to their death. First my father went as though a Spirit had taken him; then we heard cries—and a voice at midnight, calling on my brothers to seek their sire. Two have gone where the voice led, and we have never seen their faces again. Now Raymond is called, and if he goes—I—Yvette—shall be left alone."

Gareth stood holding the bridle of Raymond's horse. His brows were knitted, and his eyes were grim and keen in the moonlight.

"Come," he said suddenly. "There is some devil's trick here. A stroke of the sword may end the mystery. I will take Raymond's place to-night."

The lad's face flashed up to Gareth's with a generous denial.

"No, Messire, no. Am I a coward that—"

"I know that, lad, but I have come to my full strength. Let be—I will try my fortune. Lend me your horse, and fetch me my helmet out from the hall. The cross I wear will keep the devil from harming me."

Raymond looked at him, and then his arms fell to his side.

"So be it, Messire," he said sullenly, as though half glad and half ashamed.

But Yvette had run into the hall to search for Gareth's spear and helmet.

She came out, bearing them, her hair flooding over the burnished casque. Gareth had turned his surcoat so that the cross should not betray him. He took the spear from Yvette's hand and knelt for her to put the helmet upon him.

But before she covered his head with the casque, she stooped and kissed him, smiling a mysterious smile.

"God shall guard you, Messire," she said, and Gareth felt his heart grow great and strong within him.

Now Raymond lead them, being sore with himself, and a little ashamed, and, passing through the moonlit hall, made for the tower, to watch from its battlements what might happen. Gareth had ridden out before the lad had reached the platform, and, holding his horse well in hand, was looking right and left over the moonlit meadows.

He had not seen a slight figure dart after him across the bridge, and follow at a little distance over the grass. It was Yvette, with her cloak drawn over her bosom, and her white feet wet with the heavy dew.

Gareth, alert as a man who knows not what manner of peril may be his at any moment, rode forward slowly, his eyes searching every bush and tree. About a furlong from the moat stood a clump of aspens, their leaves flickering very faintly in the moonlight, the straight stems of the trees splashed with white light or blackened with shadows. And Gareth heard a voice calling to him from amid the aspen trees:

"Follow—follow!" it cried, "to the Monk's grave; there shall thy father meet with thee, and thy brethren—whom thou thinkest dead."

And Gareth, reining in for the moment, saw a figure on a white horse go riding out across the meadows, spectral and strange through the mists that rose from the wet grass. The rider on the white horse looked to him like a woman, and the clothes of the rider were all a-glisten as though powdered over with frost. Moreover, the eyes of the horse seemed to shine as with fire, and the breath from his nostrils rose like smoke.

Gareth crossed himself, muttered a pater noster, and, seeing that his sword was loose in its scabbard, rode on after the figure on the white horse. And at a little distance Yvette of the tower followed Gareth of Avranches, shivering with the cold of the misty meadows, yet strong in her faith to watch over the man who had taken this curse upon his head.

Now, this midnight rider led Gareth on toward the pine woods that rolled like a black flood from the hill-tops into the valley. A thousand pinnacles were touched by the moonlight, a wild-tangle of branches latticed the light of the moon. The tall trunks rose like the pillars of some vast temple. A great silence covered the place, save for the trampling of Gareth's horse.

And suddenly the woodland way opened before him, and he heard a voice calling:

"Come come, here is thy journey's end."

Now, before him, Gareth beheld a little clearing in the wood, not more than sixty paces from shade to shade, with the tree trunks like a palisade about it, and the grass short and sleek and smooth. In the midst of the clearing stood a great black mound, or barrow, half as high as Yvette's tower. And a fir tree grew on the summit thereof, like a black plume on the crown of a helmet.

Gareth was looking about him for the guide who had led him, when suddenly there was a noise like the clashing of iron doors that seemed to come from the depths of the mound. And a man on a great black horse leaped out as from the very heart of the earth itself, a man armed in black mail, with a blur of light upon his helmet, and a shield that shone like silver upon his arm.

He brandished his spear, and wheeled his horse to and fro, the beast's hoofs tearing the grass. Then he turned toward Gareth, and laughed and shook his shield.

"Guard—guard," he shouted, backing his black horse, and fowtering his spear, "the eyes of Yvette shall look long for thee on the morrow."

Now Gareth felt that he had mortal man to deal with, and that Yvette's brothers had been slain here in the midst of the pine wood, and that there was some devilry that deserved the light of day. So he put his shield forward, kicked in the spurs, and charged in on the Black Knight without word or parley. And the Black Knight's spear set Gareth's helm a-ringing, but Gareth smote the Black Knight over his horse's tail.

Gareth threw his spear aside, and was out of the saddle with sword a-gleam, ready to give his man his quittance. But the Knight of the Mound was on his feet, and breathing hard through the bars of his helmet. He was a big man, and strong in the arms, and he came at the Norman with such good-will that Gareth gave ground, keeping his shield up, hard put to it for a moment to save himself from the whirling sword. So he foined, and dodged, and kept his guard, till the Black Knight's first fury had tired him a little, for he was a man who fought like a giant for a while, but weakened with the weight and the fat he carried. Therefore Gareth watched his man, till he knew by his heavy breathing that the first flush was out of him.

Then the knight of Arranches gave a loud shout.

"Holy Cross—Holy Cross," and the man in the black harness found lightning

playing about his head. For Gareth beat about him with long, clean strokes, trying shoulder, thigh, and gorget, and baffling his man with the grim swiftness of his sword play. The Black Knight began to bleed at the throat. He was slow, overmatched, beaten to and fro about the mound.

Now Yvette had come to the clearing, and stood in the shadow, leaning against a tree, watching the men fighting, and dazed by the clangour of their blows. And as she stood there she saw a figure in white dart out from the mound, pick up Gareth's fallen spear, and creep forward to smite the Norman in the back.

Yvette's heart stood still for a moment. Then she gave a shrill cry, and ran out into the moonlight, calling to Gareth to warn him of this treachery.

Gareth heard her voice, despite the hot blood drumming in his ears, and the trampling of their feet upon the grass. He turned, sprang aside two full paces in time to catch the lance point upon his shield. And in a flash he had cut off the head from the staff, and his sword overhung the figure in white, but the thing turned from him, and fled streaking away into the darkness of the trees.

Again Yvette called to Gareth.

"Guard, Messire, guard!"

For the Black Knight had shaken the blood out of his eyes, and come by his breath again, and he rushed at Gareth, and tried to grapple him, but the Norman beat him back, and thrust at him with his shield. For Gareth had seen Yvette standing and watching in the moonlight, and for her sake his heart was grim in him, and great to make an end.

The Black Knight tottered with a blow upon the gorget, recovered, only to be smitten a second time upon the throat. He threw up his arms with a hoarse cry, his sword quivering in the moonlight, his shield jerking to and fro like the broken wing of a bird. Suddenly he fell forward upon his knees, and from his knees he sank upon his face. The fight and the life were out of him, and Gareth stood over him, and with his sword-point made certain of the doom.

He turned to Yvette, and the words that he was about to utter died in his throat, for, crawling close to the girl, like a snake in the grass, was the white figure that had led him from the tower to the Monk's Grave. Gareth sprang forward as the figure rose up at Yvette's back.

"Fall, child—fall on your face!" he shouted.

Yvette gave one side glance and obeyed him, and the knife blade touched her shoulder, but missed the more fatal

mark.

There was the flash and the whistle of a sword, flung like a curling brand at the figure in the white hood and tunic. The knife-bearer gave a low, dolorous cry, and fled away, with a red stain spreading upon its bosom. Gareth did not follow, but caught up Yvette in his arms, greatly afraid that the blow had given her her death.

"Child—child—"

Her hair fell from her face, and she looked at him and smiled.

"It is nothing—a scratch of the shoulder—"

"Our Lady be thanked," said he.

"Ah, Messire, the thanks are yours."

And he would have chided her for following him; but for the look in her great eyes.

He stood her upon her feet, and looked at her shoulder, finding but a faint red stain upon her sleeve. Then, since she seemed more precious to him because of the perils of the place, he lifted her upon his horse, mounted, and rode at a canter down through the wood-way towards the meadows. Nor did either of them speak till they were beyond the shadows of the pine trees, and saw the tower rising beneath them from the sheen of the broad moat.

"What does it mean, Messire?" she asked him, looking in his eyes.

"That you have a brave heart, child," he answered her.

"Not that—but yonder—?"

Gareth stared at the moon.

"I have slain an enemy," he said shortly. "To-morrow—when it dawns, we will go and learn the truth."

And she said no more, but suffered her head to rest upon his shoulder, for she was thinking how Rene, her father, and his two sons had been slain and hidden in those dark woods.

So they came to the tower and told Raymond all that had passed, and the lad held Yvette in his arms and kissed her, unable to scold in his gladness for her return. He embraced Gareth, and brought him wine and meat, and dressed a flesh wound that the Black Knight had given him, pouring in oil, and binding the wound with soft linen. And they will themselves in readiness for the dawn, Yvette watching, while Gareth and her brother slept.

When the dawn came, Gareth and the lad took their arms and their horses, and, leaving Yvette in the tower, rode into the pine woods to the barrow on the hill. The place was very still and silent, with the first flush of the morning touching the tops of the tall trees. The knight's black horse was still standing there, cropping the grass with his idle trailing

And the Black Knight lay dead where Gareth's sword had left him, the grass a deep purple about his body.

They turned him upon his back, and pulled off his helmet. And Raymond, when he saw his face, started up with a quick cry:

"Malvo de la Montague!"

"He who should have been in Syria?"

But the lad stood awed and silenced, understanding everything as he looked at the dead man's face. For Malvo had plotted a strange vengeance against Rene and his sons, and, perhaps, if Raymond had gone in Gareth's place, he would have lain dead there, and Malvo would have seized Yvette and married her against her will.

Gareth had turned, and walked towards the barrow. He called to Raymond suddenly, and stood pointing to an opening in the mound, an opening that had been concealed with masses of furze and litter. The Norman drew his sword, and went in with his shield forward. For the moment he could see nothing, because of the darkness of the place.

But when his eyes fathomed the depths of that strange death chamber, he stepped back suddenly, bearing back Raymond, who had pushed into the passage.

"The dead are here," he said solemnly.

And, sheathing his sword, he put his arm about the lad, and led him out into the sunlight. Then he turned the furze back over the opening, knowing that it was better that Raymond should not see what he had seen. For Sir Rene lay there wrapped in a green cloak, and on either side of him—Geoffrey and Guillaume in their armour.

So they rode back to the tower, Raymond hanging his head over his horse's neck, grieving, yet glad that the curse had been dispelled. It was Gareth who told Yvette all that they had found in that barrow amid the pine trees on the hill. She listened to him silently, her hands crossed upon her bosom, realising the fate from which Gareth had rescued her, and that Raymond's life had been saved by his sword.

"What are my thanks, Messire?" she said, looking towards the ground, her face very wistful between the glimmerings of her hair.

Gareth of Avranches held out his hands.

"In the midst of your sorrow—I must not speak," he answered, "but in all Normandy there is no hair like to thine."

But Normans in after years called Gareth's lady, "Yvette—Moon in a Mist," so that it would appear that Gareth won his wife.

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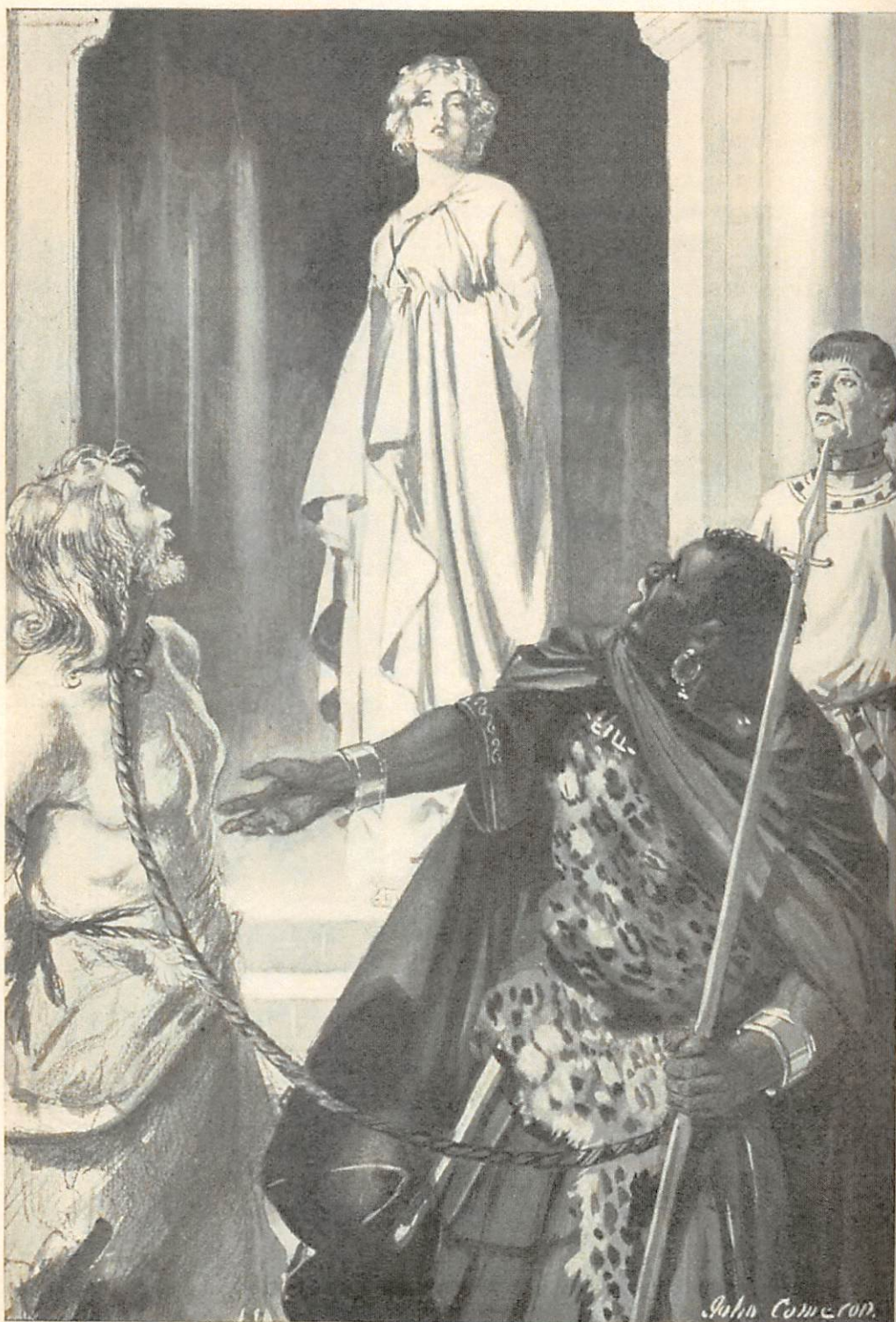
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(Drawn by JOHN CAMERON.)

"Ursus spoke with a quick, chattering grandiloquence, parading his own prowess" (p. 645).



Cynewulf, the Saxon

A THRILLING STORY OF ROMAN LIFE, TELLING OF A SLAVE'S
DEVOTION TO HIS LADY

By WARWICK DEEPING

THERE was a hurrying of people towards the southern gate of *Caer Segont*.

"Ursus and his men have taken a barbarian!"

"A giant!"

"Hairy as a goat!"

A bank of red clouds cut the evening sky into two sheets of blue and of gold, and the tall cypresses and elm trees in the gardens were still bathed in yellow light. Tossing these words from mouth to mouth, the townsfolk made haste to see this wild sea-wolf whom Ursus and his hunters had taken in the woods. The idle groups melted from the sunny places about the forum. Men and women ran out from the narrow ways between the crowded houses. Old fellows left their little gardens under the city walls. Girls in bright-coloured tunics hurried along together, chattering and holding hands.

Those who had reached the southern gate saw Ursus swaggering there and showing his white teeth. A gigantic negro, his blackness wrapped up in a scarlet cloak, he stood with the butt of his boar spear resting on the ground, his chest expanded, his head thrown back. The nostrils of his flat nose seemed swollen with arrogance, and gold bracelets glistened on his arms.

The people did not look so eagerly at Ursus as they did at the man who stood alone in the open space within the gate, held like a bear at the end of a rope. He was naked, but for a sheepskin about his loins. Someone had smitten him through the thigh with a spear, and from the wound blood still oozed. His arms were lashed behind his back so tightly that the thongs were almost hidden, and there was a red mark round his neck where the rope had chafed the skin.

He stared at the people of *Caer Segont* with a kind of fierce timidity, and they stared back at him as though he were a strange, wild beast. The man was young, tall, and strongly built, with a fleece of fairish hair, and a boyish beard spreading in gold flakes over his chin. The people could see his ribs moving as he breathed. The muscles stood out strongly under the skin, twitching from time to time like the muscles of a nervous horse.

The negro stretched out his spear, and looked boastfully at the crowd.

"A fine beast, citizens, a fine beast! I had a tussle to take him."

He grinned, and showed off his huge arm. "See here. I crushed him. I hugged the breath out of him till he was quiet."

This tawny headed, blue-eyed savage was the first sea-wolf whom the people of *Caer Segont* had seen. Though ruin and death had been spread along the

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southern coast, though Anderida had fallen and the barbarians had made a great silence there, the great forest had hidden the violence of these happenings from the people of *Caer Segont*. True, they had built city walls after the Legions had sailed many years ago, but the barbarians had never touched the town. They were like the rumour of a pestilence that would exhaust itself and pass. The great forest, grim and impenetrable, had shut off the grey blue sea and the white sails of the plundering ships. The fields and gardens about the town continued to bring forth corn and fruit.

The people crowded about Ursus and his captive. Some of them put out their hands and touched the barbarian. A young black-haired girl pricked his arm with the pin of a fibula, and laughed. Another stroked his beard with a bronze strigil.

Ursus showed his teeth.

"The beast is quiet now, neighbours. He is tamed. But you should have seen him before I crushed the breath out of his body. He fought the five of us more fiercely than any boar."

A cobbler wearing a leather apron felt the Saxon's muscles.

"It is a strong beast. What will be done with him?"

A hard-faced old woman who had lost all her teeth spoke up in a shrill, cracked voice.

"Set him to grind corn."

The crowd laughed.

"Old Mother Mors has lost her grinders. She has an eye to the millstones."

Ursus shrugged with scorn.

"Corn-grinding is for old women. I am the lord of the beasts. This sea-wolf goes to my cages. He will make sport at the games."

The people applauded, even the girls clapping their hands.

"Let him fight with the brown bear."

"No; the dogs would be better."

"Yes; but Father Gildas has forbidden us to let men fight in the amphitheatre."

"Christians, true! But a heathen beast—"

"That is different."

"Let Ursus have him. The præfect will not say him nay."

The negro swaggered, turning his great head this way and that.

"Leave him to me, neighbours. I know how to make good sport. Make way—now! Men who have hunted come by a holy hunger. I will cage up the sea-wolf in one of my dens."

He struck the barbarian with the shaft of his spear. The man stumbled, turned a fierce face, and then went forward through the crowd, Ursus holding the rope that was fastened about his neck. The people gave way, but followed on with chattering eagerness, flushed with the blood-lust that Father Gildas and his priests had not been able to wipe away. Even the young girls were noisily elated. Though here and there some softer soul felt it a pity that the young man should be torn by the claws of the bear, or have his throat bitten out by the negro's dogs.

It happened that when Ursus and the people came crowding along the stone-paved street, Flamma, the præfect's daughter, stood on the porch steps of her father's house. Two slaves waited below her on the steps, with collars of lead about their throats. As for Flamma herself, daughter of Probus the Roman, she was the despair of the petty lords of those parts who had not the valour to conquer such a mate. Her brown-black eyes melted the hearts of men; her red mouth tempted and scorned them. There was the aloofness of pride about her. She looked too fiercely beautiful to be touched. Her rust-red hair seemed to light up her smooth brown cheeks, her deep, burning eyes, her little, scornful nose, and the scarlet thread of her mouth. She was a Roman girl, with the blood of the old Romans in her.

Flamma stretched out an arm, and Ursus the negro stood like a figure in black marble. His eyes glistened, and looked evil and hungry.

"What is this?"

Ursus told her.

"A dog of a Saxon."

"Show me the man."

The people who had crowded even up to Ursus' elbows fell back, the women sneering a little, the men content to gaze. The cobblers, silversmiths, and carpenters stopped their work, and poked their heads out of the doorways of their shops when

Flamma, the daughter of Probus, passed. As for Ursus, he bowed himself, gathered his scarlet cloak more tightly over his black chest, and tugged roughly at the rope.

"Down, dog of a heathen!"

The young man, straining instinctively against the rope, stared up at Flamma as though some goddess had thrown open the brazen doors of her temple and appeared in her splendour before men.

Ursus smote him on the mouth, and then pointed to the ground.

"Ox-eyed fool, down on your knees!"

The young man continued to stare at the Roman woman, steadily, yet with wide-eyed awe. The crowd laughed. Flamma looked them over as a great lady might look at a drove of swine.

"Hold your rough ways, Ursus. How came you by the man?"

The negro cringed before her, and when a boastful man cringes he becomes ugly and contemptible. Ursus spoke with a quick, chattering grandiloquence, parading his own prowess, and showing off the muscles of his arms. Ever and again his eyes shot an upward glance at Flamma's face—a glance that gloated, and was afraid to abide. As Flamma listened she seemed to grow taller, and to look down on Ursus from an increasing height. Her mouth hardened, her nostrils became scornful. She desired to spurn the negro with one of her sandalled feet.

Ursus folded his bare arms, making the huge muscles stand out, and inflating his chest.

"Lady, I am the beast-master and your servant. I will make a fight for you between the sea-wolf here and the brown bear, or with dogs, or a wild boar, as it may please you. Or I will fight the barbarian myself, and break his back with my hands."

Flamma looked from Ursus to the Saxon. He did not cringe or shiver, and something in his eyes touched her—a fierce and half-wondering appeal, the dumb look of a thing that had been hunted. Blood from his wounded thigh marked the grey stones of the street.

She spoke to one of her slaves, and the fellow disappeared through the porch into the great corridor of the house.

"I will buy this man for a slave."

Ursus stared at her, and grinned.

"God forbid that you should take a wild beast into your house."

"God forbid that he should be treated like a beast! I say that he shall be my slave. The full price shall be paid to those who took him."

Flamma's man returned with a little iron box. He knelt on the steps and held it before his mistress, who took a key from the silk bag at her girdle.

But the people of Caer Segont were not well pleased. They began to shuffle their feet and murmur.

"She carries things with a high hand!"

"The præfect. We will see the præfect."

"This heathen dog deserves to make sport for us."

"It is easy for the rich to rob the poor."

Flamma had been counting money from the box. She raised her head and looked down upon the people. Her scorn was like fire thrown from the steps of a temple.

"What say you, people of Caer Segont? Do you murmur because I have pity? Get you to your homes, and ask Christ's mercy."

They looked at her sullenly, holding together in restless, grudging groups.

"Are you beasts that you would tear and torture? Go to Father Gildas and boast of this to him."

She turned to the barbarian and to Ursus. The young man had been watching her with intent and listening eyes.

"Cut the rope—and those bands."

The negro shrugged, drew his girdle knife, and obeyed her, while the crowd recoiled as though Ursus were letting loose some wild beast. Flamma kept her eyes upon the young man's face. When Ursus had freed him she beckoned with her hand.

"Come."

He understood the gesture, and the mercy in her eyes, and falling on the steps before her, kissed the hem of her tunic and her feet. Then he knelt up, took one of her hands, and laid it upon his bowed head. The people were silent, though a few of the women laughed.

The young man sprang up, and standing on the lowermost step, he looked threateningly and haughtily at the crowd. Though he uttered no word, and would not have been understood by them had he spoken,

the people of *Caer Segont* knew that he defied them, even though he had knelt willingly at *Flamma's* feet.

When *Cynewulf* the Saxon was taken into the *præfect's* house the people of *Caer Segont* prophesied against the madness of the thing, saying that the man was a wild beast whom no one could tame. He would frighten his fellow-slaves, break out into violence, and escape by night out of the city. Such a wolf was bound to turn upon strangers and tear them, and *Probus* would rue the fact that he was ruled by his daughter.

Yet all these prophecies were falsified, for the barbarian was as quiet and as even-tempered as some big dog. The little world of *Caer Segont* was new and amazing to him, the streets and houses, the great basilica, the mosaic floors, the paintings on the walls, the furniture in *Probus's* house. The men of his race were strangers to towns and cities, hating and mistrusting them; but *Cynewulf* seemed made of different stuff. The place was full of wonder and enchantment. Moreover, he was near to the woman who had saved him from *Ursus* and the crowd.

Titus the slave-master was set to teach *Cynewulf* the Roman tongue, and *Cynewulf* showed a grim hunger for the strange new words. So eager was he that he would pester his fellow-slaves by eternally pointing at things and asking their names. He would say words over to himself as he worked at some task that had been given him, knitting up his forehead and staring hard as though he were following the tracks of new and unknown beasts. For *Cynewulf* had had a full heart in him ever since *Flamma* had made *Ursus* cut his bonds. His gratitude to her was dumb. He hungered to pour out words, to understand her when he heard her speak. Her voice had a wonderful power over him, and made the unknown words that she uttered seem full of some noble meaning.

His fellow-slaves had made him understand that he had been saved from a dog's death, and *Cynewulf* brooded over it as though he had incurred a debt. Lying awake in his little sleeping-cell at night, he would think of *Flamma* as a glowing figure, saffron robed, with eyes that were very merciful. He was one of the slaves who were chosen to walk before her when

she went through the streets. *Cynewulf* took a pride in marching along with his staff, and thrusting the laggards out of her way; but he was always left in the court before the northern porch of the church, even when his fellow-slaves were suffered to enter. Then a sudden loneliness would come over him, and he would feel like a dog left out in the cold, while he listened to the voices of those who were singing. *Cynewulf* began to hunger to speak to the God whom his lady worshipped. His own gods, and the wild, storm-voiced spirits of the north, seemed to have fled away from before the presence of this woman.

Two months passed, and *Cynewulf* had learnt a great number of words. *Titus* the slave-master had spoken to *Flamma* concerning him, and it seemed to *Cynewulf* that she looked at him more kindly, and smiled her praise. Sometimes he had a curious conviction that his lady had him in her thoughts, that she desired some great service from him, that she was watching to see what manner of man he was.

One day *Titus* called him as he was drawing water at the well.

"Come," said he, looking solemn.

Cynewulf wondered. He was taken through the gallery into the *præfect's* garden, where roses trailed over stone arcades and sleek grass stretched between hedges of clipped yew. Peacocks spread their tails in the sunlight, and in the centre of the garden there was a stone fish-pond with steps going down to the water. The place was very beautiful. *Cynewulf* felt a yearning in his breast because of its beauty.

In a stone chair by the fish-pond sat his lady on cushions of rose and gold. She had a white veil over her head to shade her from the sunlight, and her hair shone through the white stuff like red beech leaves through silver mist. *Cynewulf* felt great awe of her. *Titus* withdrew, and left him alone before the stone seat by the fish-pond.

Flamma beckoned him to come nearer. Her eyes were big, solemn, and searching, but as they looked at *Cynewulf* they smiled. And *Cynewulf* could have fallen flat before her and offered her his life.

"*Cynewulf*, you are learning our Roman tongue?"

He stammered out: "Yes, lady."

"You are content—here?"

"Yes, lady."

"You do not wish to run away?"

"To run away?"

"To your own people?"

"No; I be your man."

She seemed to muse for a moment, and Cynewulf thought that she looked troubled and sad. She glanced up suddenly, and their eyes met.

"Cynewulf, you are free. You can go back to your own people."

He did not understand her immediately. She spoke the words again, and Cynewulf flushed, and looked troubled.

"Have I not served well?"

"It is not that."

"Am I—bad man?"

She smiled at him, and Cynewulf trembled.

"I not leave you," he said.

"Then you are no longer a slave. I give you freedom."

"Tell me—stay."

"Is it your desire?"

"I am my lady's," and his eyes appealed to her.

Flamma turned her head and watched the gold-fish swimming in the water. She sighed, and her hands felt under the folds of her robe. She drew out something that shone—a Roman sword.

"What is this, Cynewulf?"

He was prompt with the word.

"A sword."

She held it so that the point was turned towards her throat.

"To kill with?"

He nodded.

"In the hand of a bad man—to kill Probus, my father. To bring sorrow and shame—to me!"

Cynewulf trembled, but not with fear. Lines crossed his forehead. His mouth looked fierce.

"Show me that evil man!"

"You would fight for us?"

He opened his arms, and his face blazed.

"Give me the sword. I—kill."

Flamma leant forward and looked at him as though searching his heart.

"Cynewulf, listen to me. Evil men would kill my father, and our slaves are not to be trusted. Valens, who sleeps at the door, is a false man. He has taken

money, and I have sent him away. I give you this sword, and make you watchman, to lie across the door at night."

Cynewulf's face was transfigured.

"If needs be, I will die there," he said.

Flamma gave him the sword, and he kissed its blade, and thrust it into his girdle. For the moment he stood irresolute, looking at her with the eyes of a dog.

"Speak, Cynewulf."

"Lady, I would pray to your God, Him they call Christ."

"You would be a Christian?"

"I would send my prayer after my lady's prayer."

She smiled, as one smiles at a child.

"It shall be so, Cynewulf," she said, "the holy men shall teach you."

These were wonderful days for Cynewulf the Saxon. He was given a shield and a coat of mail, and suffered to take to himself a short-handled axe that he found in the woodman's lodge. At night he spread his mats across the street door at the end of the great corridor, and lay down, hugging an immense pride. By day Sanctus the priest came and taught him in the vine-covered loggia opening upon the main court. Cynewulf would sit and listen, and learn to utter simple prayers. The strange beauty of the Christ's life entered into his soul. And sometimes, towards evening, Flamma would send for him into the garden, and would teach him from her own lips, telling of the mighty and just wrath of God, and the merciful love of Christ the Son. She taught Cynewulf the simple tales of Bethlehem and Galilee, of the Garden of Gethsemane, of Calvary, and of the rising from the tomb. She told him, too, of the saints and martyrs, of Joseph of Arimathea, and the great church at Glastonbury. Yet even through the soft murmur of the holy words ran sounds of fierceness and of valour that stirred Cynewulf's soul. He longed to leap and to use his sword for the White Christ, and for Flamma his lady.

It was a July night, and a full moon was shining, when Red Morgan's men climbed over the city wall and crept through Caer Segont under the shadows of the houses. There were five of them, three Britons, a Greek, and a Spaniard, ruffians who lived by brigandage and

violence. The Spaniard, who was a very big man, and the leader, carried a heavy iron bar. Red Morgan had given them his orders and a sum of money, for he wished Probus the Roman dead.

Cynwulf was sleeping, but he woke to the sound of men whispering in the porch. Then something was thrust between the door and the door-post, and the wood cracked and the hinges groaned. Cynwulf leapt to his feet and drew back three paces, shield on arm and axe in his right hand. The corridor was in utter darkness, though faint streaks of moonlight showed about the door.

Morgan's men were straining at the iron bar. One hinge snapped, the other followed it, bolts and lock gave, and the door fell in with a crash. Cynwulf did not wait to parley. He was on the men like a leopard out of a cave, and striking with the axe before they could guard their heads. The Spaniard went down with a split skull. A Briton stumbled, blood-blinded, out into the moonlight. The other three took to their heels and ran.

Then Probus' slaves awoke. Torches were lit and came flaming down the corridor. Probus' white head towered above the heads of his slaves. A woman wrapped in a black cloak, her red hair loose upon her shoulders, hastened down the stairway that led to the upper rooms. Cynwulf stood there, holding the wounded Briton by the throat.

"I fight," he said; "they run away. But here are two."

The slaves took the Briton from him, uttering shrill cries. Probus, sword on thigh, stood and stroked his beard. Cynwulf looked towards Flamma wrapped in her black cloak.

"Cynwulf keeps faith," he said; "he is Christ's man."

Probus took a ring from his finger.

"Christ's man—and mine. Let him be baptised."

And baptised he was next morning in the church of St. Joseph, where Father Gildas served the altar. Probus the præfect and Flamma stood as witnesses. They gave him the name of Gerontius, though he was known afterwards to the Britons as Geraint.

Summer went and autumn came, and vague rumours of evil began to breathe

about Caer Segont. It was said that the barbarians had landed near Vectis, that they were plundering and slaying, and that Winchester had fallen. Then white-faced, wayworn people came straggling to Caer Segont, people who spoke in hoarse whispers of anguish and horror and death. The reds and golds of the autumn woods were sad and distressed. The wind moaned. Men were afraid to go out and gather the apples in the outlying orchards.

Probus and the Fathers gathered together the old soldiers, called on the young men, and brought forth a bronze eagle out of the treasury. Guards were set at the gates, sentinels along the walls, and men were drilled in the forum. As for Cynwulf, he looked grave and troubled. Some of the people mistrusted him, but Cynwulf trusted his own heart.

The hour of its death agony came suddenly and by night to Caer Segont. There was the screaming of a trumpet at the southern gate, wild cries, the glare of torches, a running to and fro of men in the streets and lanes.

"The barbarians—the barbarians!"

Women huddled their children together and fled to the great basilica and the churches. Probus had gone forth with his slaves to rally the men of Caer Segont, but he left Cynwulf in the house.

"Guard thy lady," he had said.

And Cynwulf had kissed the old man's hand.

Men fought that night at the gates and in the streets, in the gardens, and in the houses. The barbarians were everywhere. They leapt like madmen, striking with axe and sword, bellowing when wounded or when burning brands were hurled into their faces. The men of Caer Segont were slain in their own streets, nor was mercy shown even to the women and children. Probus the præfect fell very early by the southern gate. The people were taking refuge in the churches, and in the basilica, defending themselves desperately and barricading the doors and windows.

Crowds fled past Probus' house, shouting, "To the basilica—to the basilica!"

Cynwulf and Flamma were standing in the darkened porch. She was very silent, full of a mute anguish, fearing the worst.

"My father?"



(Drawn by JOHN CAMERON.)

"Cynwulf stood there, holding the wounded Briton by the throat. 'I fight,' he said; 'they run away. But here are two'" (p. 648).

Cynewulf sprang out and seized a man who was flying by.

"Where is Probus the præfect?"

The man squealed and tried to escape, but Cynewulf held him fast.

"Speak! What news?"

"Probus is dead."

"Swear to it."

"I saw him slain."

Cynewulf let the man go and went back to the porch. The fellow had uttered the words so loudly that Flamma had caught the truth of her father's death. Nor did it come upon her as a blow out of the darkness. Death had looked at her out of her father's eyes when he had said farewell.

She stood there, looking out into the night.

"Cynewulf, save yourself."

"Lady, I still serve you."

"No, no. Probus my father is dead. It is sufficient that I follow him. Join yourself to your own people."

Cynewulf sprang up the steps suddenly and thrust her back into the porch. A stream of fierce, panting men went by in the darkness, shouting barbaric words. Flamma shuddered, despite her courage. As for Cynewulf he was trembling, but not with fear.

"You shall not have death!"

"Cynewulf!"

"I fight death—I beat him off. Come! I am mad for the Lord Christ."

He caught her up before she could so much as put out a hand to stay him, and descending the steps, he began to run through the darkened streets.

Flamma struggled in his arms.

"I charge you, let me go."

He held her the closer, setting his teeth against her passionate desire for sacrifice. She should live, or he would die with her in his arms.

From the mouth of an alley a man sprang at them with threatening sword. Flames had shot up from the roof of a neighbouring house, and the glare showed the man's barbaric beard and hair.

Cynewulf roared at him in the Saxon tongue.

"Keep off—the spoil is mine!"

The man laughed, peered into Flamma's face, and clapped Cynewulf on the back.

"Well chosen, brother; there is good plunder here."

From that moment Flamma lay very still in Cynewulf's arms. Now and again he felt a great shudder go through her, but she remained silent and resisted him no longer. Cynewulf threaded his way through the side streets towards the western gate. The town seemed empty and silent here, stricken with dumb horror. Away towards the forum flames were waving above the housetops and about the black pinnacles of the cypresses. A wild uproar filled the night.

Cynewulf gained the western gate. It was closed, and the bar was up, but the guards had fled from the guard-room. He stood his axe against the wall, threw down the bar with one hand, shot back the bolts, and swung the door open. A fresh breeze blew through the tunnel of the gateway. Cynewulf took his axe again, and carried Flamma out into the night.

An hour passed before Cynewulf paused, and turned to look back at *Caer Segont*. He had stumbled along field-paths and through orchards, and had gained the edge of the western woods. *Caer Segont* showed as a red mound, a little heap of flames. Cynewulf was hot and weary, and his heart laboured under his ribs. He set Flamma upon her feet, under the boughs of a great beech tree.

She leant against the tree trunk and covered her face with her hands. The agony of the night seemed more bitter under the shadows of the silent woodlands. The darkness felt big and swollen with despair.

When she uncovered her face, Cynewulf was kneeling at her feet,

"Have no fear," he was saying. "See—I am your man and your servant. No evil thing shall come near so long as I live to strike."

Flamma's heart went out to him in a sudden rush of tears. She bowed herself, and her tears fell down upon Cynewulf's face.

"Cynewulf, stay with me."

She gave him her hands, and he took them as a man takes the Body and Blood of Our Lord.

"The Lord Christ has made me your man," he said.

And from that moment Flamma loved him.

BARBE OF THE BLACK HAIR.

By WARWICK DEEPING.



HE young Sieur de Chantylon came riding back from the waterways of the river, over the waving grassland that was ablaze with the broderies of spring. He had been hawking all day with his favourite "haggard," and had brought down three herons that were making passage from the river to the woods.

Aymery, who rode in half-armour and carried sword and poniard at his belt, drew his cloak round him, for the mists were making the evening raw, and three leagues lay between them and Chantylon in its valley. His men were jogging close behind him, keeping watch on the thickets of the forest of Grosbois that rose before them towards the west. The English wars had filled the land with thieves and footpads, and no man was safe in Grosbois after dark.

They had passed a mile or more into the forest, whose peaks were still fringed with the flame of the west, when the hawk on Aymery's wrist began to scream and bate, digging her talons into the embroidered glove.

"What ails the bird? Ssh, wench! stop clawing my wrist!"

He shook the "haggard" and cuffed her gently, but the bird still screamed as though restless and ill at ease. Aymery, puzzled, handed her to Brunet the falconer, not sorry to be free of her talons for the moment.

"What ails the wench? See if the hood fits ill, or the jesses chafe her."

Brunet had taken the bird, and she grew less noisy and restive on his wrist. The falconer had the air of a man who was listening, his eyes looking this way and that into the depths of the darkening woods.

"The bird is troubled, messire," he said.

"Troubled, eh! What has she to fuss about?"

"Heaven knows, messire."

"Is she a witch, the quean?"

Brunet stroked the bird and whistled to her softly.

"A hawk's moods are like a woman's," he said, "I have heard old falconers say"—and he stiffened suddenly—"did ye hear that?"

He had reined in, and was listening like a watch-dog that hears thieves skulking about a house at night. Aymery's eyes darkened, and his mouth grew sharp as he looked ahead into the thickets. The tall pine trees hemmed them in, grim and windless, impenetrable as the night.

"Hist!"

Far and faint came a shrill cry like the cry of some wild thing trapped in the forest. Aymery heard it and frowned at his men. They were all motionless, listening, and looking questioningly into each other's eyes.

"What do you make of it, Brunet?" he asked.

The falconer began stroking the hawk.

"I cannot say, messire."

"Here, Jehan, you know these southern wood-ways. Is there a house or hovel near?"

Jehan, a sleepy fellow, with dull eyes and a yellow beard, stood up in the stirrups and studied the outlines of the hills.

"There is old Wenna's cottage half a mile away," he said—"Wenna the witch, who sells charms and simples, and cures the murrain."

Aymery had not heard of the old lady, but he was moved by the natural ardour of youth to thrust his meddlesome person into any adventure that might lure him towards a scuffle. Grosbois was an unholy haven after dark, what with footpads, wolves, and the rough soldiery who cursed every corner of the land. Peril was as the spices of Ind to Aymery's palate. He declared for an investigation, and calling Jehan to take the lead, bade him head for old Wenna's cottage.

The twilight deepened as they pushed through the thickets, and stars just began to glitter above the trees. Aymery heard the shrill cry of a ghost or some wood-spirit called up by the night. Even the Sieur de Chantylon's warm adventuresomeness was not unaffected by the mystery thereof. He

reined in suddenly as they were rounding a clump of beeches, and saw a red dash of flame jerking to and fro beyond the trunks of the trees.

"A torch, messire," said the falconer quietly.

Aymery smiled at his own imagination, and went forward cautiously, telling the men to charge up and join him if he should whistle. Before him through the trees he saw the dark outline of a timber cottage, the long and shaggy thatch hanging down over the eaves. A rushlight was burning in one window, and through the half-open door he had a glimpse of a broken settle lying across the fireless hearth. In front of the cottage two men were at work, carrying faggots from a little hovel and piling them about the door. One of them carried a lighted torch, the flare thereof flashing on him and showing that he was armed. A little distance up the glade Aymery saw another fellow dragging a dark and indefinite something over the grass.

Suddenly from the cottage came the shrill and long-given cry that Brunet had first heard down in the pine thickets nearly a mile away. The men who were carrying the faggots threw them down and looked at each other half doubtingly. Then the one who carried the torch went to the doorway and shouted to someone within—

"Curse you, hold your squealing!"

"Mercy, sirs, mercy! I am no witch!"

The fellow in armour rejoined his comrade.

"Better burn them both, mother and brat," he said, "and there will be no more plaguing of the lord's cattle."

The *Sieur de Chantylon* had heard enough. They were three against three, and the magnanimity of youth outvoiced the whisperings of superstition. He whistled to Jehan and the falconer, and plucking out his sword, rode straight for the man who was holding the torch. The fellow saw the plunging hoofs of a great horse, and the shimmer of a sword-blade sweeping on him: out of the twilight. He swung his torch at the horse's head, sprang in as the beast swerved and reared, and struck a second blow at the rider's face. Aymery parried it, and, shortening his sword, lunged at the man and pierced the plates of his gorget. He spun round and fell, the torch spluttering and flaring beneath him on the sodden grass.

The second gentleman had thrown down the faggots he was carrying, and was running to join in the tussle when the torch-

bearer went down upon the grass. Aymery gave him no leisure to reflect. The generous blade was thirsting for more blood, and the fellow, shirking the vehemence thereof, turned and scampered for the woods. Aymery let the fellow go and faced about for more foes. Jehan and the falconer were chasing the third ruffian across the clearing: he stumbled, fell, and had his quittance, as a sharp yelp made certain.

Aymery swung out of the saddle, threw the bridle to Brunet, who came running up, and turned towards the cottage. The slit of a window showed a solitary taper burning, winking at the night with pathetic yet jocose humility. Aymery pushed in over the threshold, ready to see some slatternly creature welcoming the rescue given by the seigniorial sword. What he beheld was a young girl with coal-black hair, tied by the wrists to two of the rough posts that propped the thatched and rickety roof.

Aymery came to a sudden halt, astonished, and returning in his astonishment the stare that he had from the girl's great black eyes. She was tall and slim, yet not long and angular like most girls of her age, and her frightened face touched him with its doubt and dread. To Aymery she looked like some wild creature tied up ready for the butcher's knife. Her red lips were quivering, and her wrists bleeding with the chafing of the cords.

The *Sieur de Chantylon* went up to her, smiling the smile of omnipotent and generous youth. The girl's eyes never wandered from his face. She watched him and seemed conscious of the sword he carried.

"Mercy, lording!"

Mercy, indeed! Did she take him for a butcher? Aymery regarded her with the lofty beneficence of two-and-twenty.

"Come, child, you have nothing to fear. We have chanced on a good hour, judging by these cords. There, keep your arms steady. Now, tell me—I am the *Sieur de Chantylon*—what is the meaning of it all?"

He cut the cords and set her free, only to find her on her knees before him, trying to kiss his hands.

"There, there," and he lifted her up with a young man's hatred of tears and fluster, "no one shall harm you. Who are these vagabonds whom I have had the pleasure of putting to confusion?"

The girl drew back and stood before him, her hands folded over her bosom. Her great black eyes, liquid and mysterious, dwelt on Aymery with a solemnity that was

not free from fear. She wore nothing but a coarse green tunic over her shift, and her white feet and ankles twinkled beneath the ragged edge thereof.

"I am called Barbe, messire," she said—"Barbe of the Black Hair."

Aymery nodded; he was wondering boyishly at the pearl-brown beauty of her face.

"My mother, messire"—and she shuddered—"sold simples—and the like. She had done no ill to anybody, but one of the Lord of Noirterre's stewards stole some of his lord's cattle, and, to hide the theft, swore that they had died of the murrain, and that my mother had cast a spell over the beasts."

The thing was trivial enough, but lives were counted of little worth in those brave days. Aymery understood how Wenna's death had come about, and that the wretches would have burnt the daughter alive also.

"And your mother, child?" he asked her.

She broke down of a sudden, covered her face with her hands, and began to sob. Aymery knew the source and current of her grief.

It was old Wenna's body he had seen being dragged back across the glade, to be burnt with Barbe in the doomed cottage.

He let the girl weep awhile, and waved back Jehan and Brunet, who were lurking at the door. It was but natural that her grief should turn to tears. Aymery pitied her and was discreet enough not to meddle with her sorrow. He turned, went out, and looked at the man his sword had smitten, and found him dead, with the torch quenched under him. Twenty paces away lay old Wenna, the witch, her hands clawing at the wet grass, her mouth wide open. Aymery turned from her with a shudder. It was better, he thought, that Barbe should not see her mother dead.

"Jehan"—and he leant upon his sword—"you and Brunet had better bury the old woman. I doubt not that you will find a spade in the cottage. Go in quietly; don't trouble the girl."

They obeyed him, and were soon at work digging a shallow grave for the Witch of Grosbois. Aymery watched them, leaning on his sword, and pondering sententiously according to the philosophy of two-and-twenty. When the work was done, he turned back to the cottage, and found Barbe brooding beside the fireless hearth.

"Come, child, listen to me."

She started up, clenching her hands, her eyes full of the darkness of the night.

"Ah, messire, my mother!"

Aymery crossed himself.

"She is dead," he said, "and we have buried her."

"Buried!" and the girl hung her head and seemed to droop as the truth pressed heavily upon her heart.

The Sieur de Chantylon glanced thoughtfully round the wretched room. The girl could not stay there; that was certain. He must take her home with him, like the orphan death had made her.

"Barbe."

He spoke the name gently, and with a touch of tenderness for her in her desolation.

"Yes, lord."

"You cannot stay here, child. Will you come back with me to Chantylon?"

Her great eyes dwelt on him questioningly a moment, searching his frank and serious face.

"Yes, lord," she said, folding her hands.

"They shall take care of you."

"Yes, lord, I am ready to be your servant."

And so they took her with them through the woods to the Seigneur's castle, where his banner flew.

Now, Barbe had been but a month at Chantylon when Guymon, the woodcutter, desired to have her as his wife. Day by day he would carry in his bundles of faggots and pile them in the great wood-pen near to the kitchen. Every day he would slink about the court, his little red eyes glistening, and his hairy mouth primed with the soft words he would give the girl. Sometimes he would seek her in the kitchen, for Barbe had been set by the Lady Joan, Aymery's mother, to cook and scour with the other wenches.

But if Guymon, the red-chinned weazel, had eyes for a fair face, Aymery, his lord, was none less quick. From that first twilight ride through the forest there had been something in Barbe's beauty that had set her moving ever before his mind. Her great eyes, her cloud of hair, her red-lipped mouth, the brown whiteness of her wistful face—these were pure truths, despite the crabbed dogmas of a feudal system. Aymery was an honest lad, clean-hearted, and the master of his own strong manhood. He knew that Barbe was not for him, that a hundred barriers lay between them. It was not in the lad's nature to dower poor Barbe with the peril of his love. They met but rarely, for the kitchen and the dais were as far divided as were earth and heaven.

Villain child that she was, honourless and without hopes, Barbe of the Black Hair

looked upwards ever to Aymery, who was her lord. Love and a simple homage met, and were mingled under the coarse green cloth that covered her bosom. To her there was no man like the *Sieur de Chantylon*. It was even a joy to her to see his face but for a moment as he crossed the court to hawk or hunt. What broad shoulders he had! how true a smile! what a proud throw back of the head! She loved to see him in his handsome clothes, but most of all in his bright armour. To poor Barbe brooding beside the kitchen fire, Aymery was a *Galahad*, though Barbe had never heard of such a hero.

The days were sad for France, with the English burning and pillaging the land, the Black Death but lately passed, the peasants starving and growing mad with misery and wrong. The *Sieur de Chantylon* had fought at *Poitiers* when the *Lilies of France* went down into the dust. Gloom and sorrow pressed heavy on the land. There were no leaders in France, no great ones to grip the reins. Anarchy and wrong reigned everywhere; the gentry shut themselves in their strong places; the peasants snarled and counted their grievances. It was then that the brutal *Jacquerie* spread like fire through many of the fairest fields of France. Murder broke loose. Savagery and lust hunted cheek by jowl.

One morning Barbe was spreading linen to dry in the field outside the gate when Guymon came by, carrying faggots on his back. He had been more bold with the girl of late, ignoring her coldness and the sharpness of her tongue. Barbe feared Guymon as the fallow deer fears the wolf. He was hateful to her—ugly and unholy—with his loose mouth and his little, leering eyes.

"*St. Denis* shine on you, wench!" and he threw down his sticks and looked at her longingly.

Barbe said nothing, but went on with her work.

"My pretty one, let me help to spread the stuff."

He came slouching forward and began pulling out the wet linen from the basket in which she had carried it.

"Never trouble, Guymon," she said curtly.

The man eyed her, grinning and fingering his chin.

"Hist, Barbe! would ye hear a secret?"

"I have naught to do with secrets, Guymon."

"Ah, wench, but would you like to be

made a great lady?" and he gave a mysterious tilt of the head.

Barbe blushed, thinking of Aymery, her lord.

"Are you touched in the brain, Guymon?" she asked.

"No, no," and he tapped his forehead; "there be great doings in the wind. Brave fellows will have the wine. Never tell me Guymon can't bring the biggest tree toppling in the forest. We poor folk shall have our day."

Barbe went on with the spreading of her linen, but a sudden fear had seized her heart.

"You have a secret, Guymon," she said carelessly.

"Trust me; Guymon's no fool."

She looked at him and veiled her hate.

"Will you tell me your secret?" she asked, with a smile.

"No, not I," and he grinned; "that is—without a kind word for a bargain."

Barbe stood up, smoothing her dress down with her hands.

"What shall I give you for the secret, Guymon?" she asked.

"Come down to the beech thicket to-morrow, after dusk," he answered, "and I will show you how you may become a great lady."

Hardly had Guymon picked up his sticks and slouched on towards the castle, when Aymery came riding in from the woods, gay and handsome, hawk on wrist. He was singing as he rode, his horse cantering proudly, brave cloth of gold a-glitter in the sun.

He saw Barbe spreading her linen, her bare feet like two white flowers in the grass, and pulled up with a blush to speak to her. The *Sieur de Chantylon's* love-song had not been so far from the girl's heart.

"Barbe, child, Barbe," and he looked at her, instinctive wonder for her beauty welling up into his eyes.

She stood before him with clasped hands, silent and sorrowful.

"What would my lord with me?"

Aymery seemed to lack words for the moment.

"Are you happy with us, Barbe? they treat you well?"

"I am happy, lord."

"Yes, yes; and have they given you no shoes?"

He was looking at the white feet and sparkling ankles under the edge of the green gown. Barbe looked at them also, and then at Aymery; nor could she keep from reddening a little.



"He saw Harbe spreading her linen."

"Yes, lord, they have given me shoes."

"And you will not wear them, eh? Pretty feet are rare. Come, child, is it true that Guymon the woodcutter would have you for his wife?"

"Yes, lord," and she blushed.

"And you, Barbe, how lies your heart?"

She thought to confess all to him on the moment, but remembered Guymon's secret and hung her head.

"I have not taken him yet, messire," she said.

Aymery looked pained and a little stern about the mouth. Could one so fair think of marriage with such as Guymon, a fellow whose back was crooked, and whose body never knew the wash-tub? He was shocked at her half-consent; and the girl saw it.

"Ah, lord, I will speak to thee before Guymon has his promise."

Aymery turned his horse to ride on.

"I am your friend, child," he said, wondering at the disgust and bitterness in his heart.

At the great gate he met Guymon shouldering his hatchet. Seigneur and villein looked at each other askance, for each had a hidden hatred coiled up in the heart.

It was growing dusk on the morrow when Barbe flitted like a black bat through the gate, and stole across the meadows towards the beech wood where she was to meet Guymon. There was a lurking dread within her, for they had heard grim rumours of late at Chantylon, of castles sacked and nobles slain. Two days ago the Lady Joan had ridden to the strong town of Virelay, some ten leagues distant, taking with her twelve men as an escort, and two of the serving-women. But two men-at-arms were left with Aymery at Chantylon, old Isabel, who tended the linen, and Barbe of the Black Hair. True, there were the peasants lodged in their hamlet not half a mile away; but it was these peasant folk whom Barbe distrusted, though she scarce knew why.

Guymon was waiting in the beech thicket when she stole in among the smooth round trunks. He started up on seeing her, his hands opening and shutting restlessly, his little eyes twinkling with satisfaction. Barbe hated the man as she had never hated him before, as he came fawning up to her with a grin of glee on his ugly face.

"Good, you have come; you would be a great lady, eh?" and he laughed and stroked her arm with his coarse hands.

Barbe had her part to play; she suffered

Guymon's caresses without a shudder and quieted her hate.

"I have always had an eye for thee, Guymon," she said, "though I have kept my tongue sharp."

The woodcutter chuckled and put an arm about her waist.

"Well, you will have me and my secret? 'Tis a brave one—like its master. We of the soil are to have our rights. Come, wench, you are with us, eh?"

"Yes, I am with you, Guymon," and she gave him a kiss.

Guymon squirmed.

"Oh, the brave beauty! How should you like Chantylon for your house, eh? We are going to make an end of the gentlemen and the clerks; we folk of the soil are to be the men. Our fellows have taken Rocroy and Vallaimy. They have slain the Lord of Noirterre and his lady. Our blood is up, wench, our blood is up. Ha! you shall be proud of Guymon the woodcutter when he takes the lead to-night."

He hopped, strutted, gesticulated, made faces in his excitement and conceit. Barbe, cold to the heart, suffered his frenzy and hid her hate.

"To-night, Guymon?" she asked.

"To-night we will show the proud young falcon yonder how the villeins of Grosbois can clip his wings. It will be easy, wench: there are only two men in the place. You shall go back——"

She thrust out her hand and gripped Guymon's shoulder.

"Yes, I can open the gate for you."

He clapped his hands and kissed her.

"A treasure, a treasure! You guess everything. We can stab Messire Aymery in his bed."

Guymon's savagery made her feel sick and faint. Why, what had the Sieur de Chantylon done, that these wretches were for murdering him in his sleep? Was he not their lord, and a generous lord, merciful and without greed? But the Sieur de Chantylon was one of the nobles, and therefore doomed, as Barbe knew.

"Shall I go back now, Guymon?" she asked innocently. "It is dark, and they may have barred the gate."

The woodcutter rubbed his chin, and acknowledged her discretion.

"In an hour we shall be at the gate. Open it, wench, and we'll do the rest. You shall be a great lady. Guymon is no fool."

She paid no heed to his preposterous apings of greatness, the way he strutted and

mouthed his words. Yet Guymon was dangerous for the moment, because of the savage rabble he could gather at his back. Barbe stood looking towards the castle, her whole soul set on saving Aymery.

"I will open the gate, Guymon," she said. "Good. We shall bring beams in case the bridge is up and you cannot move it. Give me a kiss, wench. I will make thy fortune."

She brushed the man's kiss from her mouth as she sped back through the beech trees and over the meadows towards the castle. To save Aymery, that was her heart's desire. Night had fallen, and Chantylon's tower loomed up drearily across the moat. Two men and the Seigneur to hold such a place! Barbe cursed Guymon for his cruel cunning as she ran along the causeway, breathless and fearful. She stopped with a sharp cry, and started from the yawning gap left by the raised bridge. The gate was closed; not the wink of a light showed through the guardroom squints.

Barbe shouted, curving her hands about her mouth—

"Jehan! Jehan!"

No one answered her; the place was black and silent as a ruin. The men were asleep or drunk upon the guardroom floor.

Again she shouted—

"Jehan! Jehan! Messire Aymery! it is I—Barbe!"

The black walls mocked her, their sharp bases bathed by the waters of the moat. Already in her terror she imagined Guymon and his murderers crossing the meadows to break in and slay young Aymery in his sleep. Heavens! what was she to do? Swim the moat and try to scale the palisades that edged the garden? How black and terrible the water looked, deep and treacherous about the place! Yes, but she had learnt to swim in the great pool near her mother's cottage. It was only the darkness that made her afraid, and she must win the place somehow and warn her lord in time.

Quick as thought she slipped off her tunic, and dropped by her hands from the bridge ledge into the water, and began to swim towards the castle. The black walls towered over her, creviceless and unscalable, as she struck forward boldly with the water bubbling at her chin. Soon she had reached the shallows below the palisades, and climbed on to the narrow strip of grass before the fence, her whole body aglow with the warmth gotten of her swim. Never resting for a moment, she made a spring, got her hands upon the top of the fence, and writhed

herself up with the sinuous strength of a cat. Dropping down into the garden, she darted away towards the court.

The Sieur de Chantylon, tired after a day's solitary hawking, had gone to his chamber early, suspecting no treachery and no violence of the night. He was awakened by a shrill voice calling from the stairway of the tower, and a hand beating upon his door.

"Messire Aymery! Messire Aymery! awake! awake!"

He tumbled out of bed, slipped on his tunic and surcoat in the dark, and opening the door, found a dim, white figure waiting without.

"Barbe, you?"

"Ah, lord, the villeins have risen! They are coming to sack the place and to slay you! Save yourself, save yourself!"

Aymery, grown grim and thoughtful of a sudden, stretched out his hand and touched Barbe's shoulder. Her shift was dripping with the water from the moat, and she was beginning to shiver with the cold.

"Barbe, what is this? Why, child, you are wet and frozen."

She laughed, a little, happy laugh, her eyes shining on him out of the dark.

"Guymon is a traitor, lord," she said. "He has sought my love, and I have hated him, but yesterday he spoke strangely and hinted at peril. He bade me meet him in the beech wood after dark. I tricked the fool and won the truth from him. I was to open the gate and let them in to you."

She paused, breathless, yet fierce to have it finished.

"The gate was shut, lord, when I came back. Jehan and Arnald are asleep. I swam the moat and climbed the palisades. Ah, lord, there is no time to lose. Save yourself before they come."

Aymery was leaning against the doorpost, his eyes fixed on Barbe's white face. He went close to her of a sudden, kissed her, and thrust her into the room.

"God's blessing on you, child," he said.

"Quick! you will find clothes in the chest. A tunic and surcoat of mine will not suit you ill. Take off that wet linen, or you will die of a chill."

Barbe, her face burning with his kiss, went into the bedchamber and did as he had bidden her. She drew the rich stuffs out of the chest, dropped her own shift, and then scurried into Aymery's clothes. The Sieur de Chantylon had descended the stairs, his heart cantering, half with the zest of the night's peril, half with the strange joy that he

could hardly christen. Crossing the court and coming to the guardroom, he found the place dark as a pit, and a sound of snoring rising from the depths thereof. Aymery shouted and groped his way into the room. Jehan and his comrade grunted, babbled, but never stirred. They were drunk. Their lord cursed them and stood listening.

A sound as of men running, the low growl of distant voices, a pattering of feet along the causeway! Aymery sprang out of the guardroom, slipped back the grill of the great gate, and saw a blurred and moving mass beyond the gap left by the raised bridge. A hoarse whisper came to him out of the dark.

"Barbe, Barbe, art there?"

Aymery smiled grimly.

"I am here, dogs!" he shouted.

There was silence for a moment, and then a confused clamour rose on the causeway.

"Treachery!"

"On, on! bring up the beams! The wench shall be strangled!"

"Down with Chantylon! down with the seigneurs!"

Aymery had heard enough. He turned, ran across the court, and climbed the tower stair, debating what he should do. A light met him in the dark. It was Barbe bearing a candle that she had lit, her face white amid the black masses of her hair.

"They are at the gate."

Aymery thrust her before him up the stair, his arm half-crooked about her body.

"Jehan and Arnald are drunk," he said; "these dogs will break down the gate; I cannot hold it all alone. Quick, child, into the room here! I must hold the stair. Take my poniard, Barbe—you understand! They must not find you living."

He held her close to him for one moment, looking down into her face. Her eyes met his. She took a long breath, shivered, and tried to smile.

"Lord, I have blundered. Leave me, save yourself; I am not afraid to die."

In that brief moment Aymery seemed to see all that was in her heart. He went red despite his grinning, and, bending, kissed her hair.

"No, no, Barbe; they shall not come at you save over my body. To arms! Quick, dear—my hauberk—there on the peg! The greaves and armpieces are yonder. Fasten them. How your hands tremble! Quick! they are breaking the gate."

He had slipped on the hauberk, and was standing while she buckled on the greaves

and armpieces. Her eyes and lips were smiling. Somehow he did not fear death that night.

"Now, good sword," and he took it from the bedpost where it hung, "out—and strike true. Child, these dogs shall fight. You shall see how a gentleman of France can hold his own."

He set the door wide, put his shield forward, and took his stand at the head of the stair. Barbe watched him like one in a dream. Then she gave a sudden cry, ran to the window and looked out, and darted back towards the bed.

"Messire, messire, a hope yet!"

"Ah!"

"I will twist the clothes and make a rope. The sheets will bear; it is not forty feet, and a clean drop into the moat."

Aymery caught her meaning and flashed a blessing at her.

"Well thought of, child. I will hold the stair and then fall back and bar the door. That will gain time. To work, Barbe, to work!"

She tore the coverlet and sheeting from the bed, her ears filled with the din and thunder at the gate. Her hands worked like things inspired. Taking Aymery's poniard, she cut off her hair, wound strands of it about the coiled sheets, knotted them together, smiling and showing her teeth as each knot held. A roar of voices, and they knew that the gate was down. Aymery cast one look at Barbe over his shoulder and then turned to hold the stair.

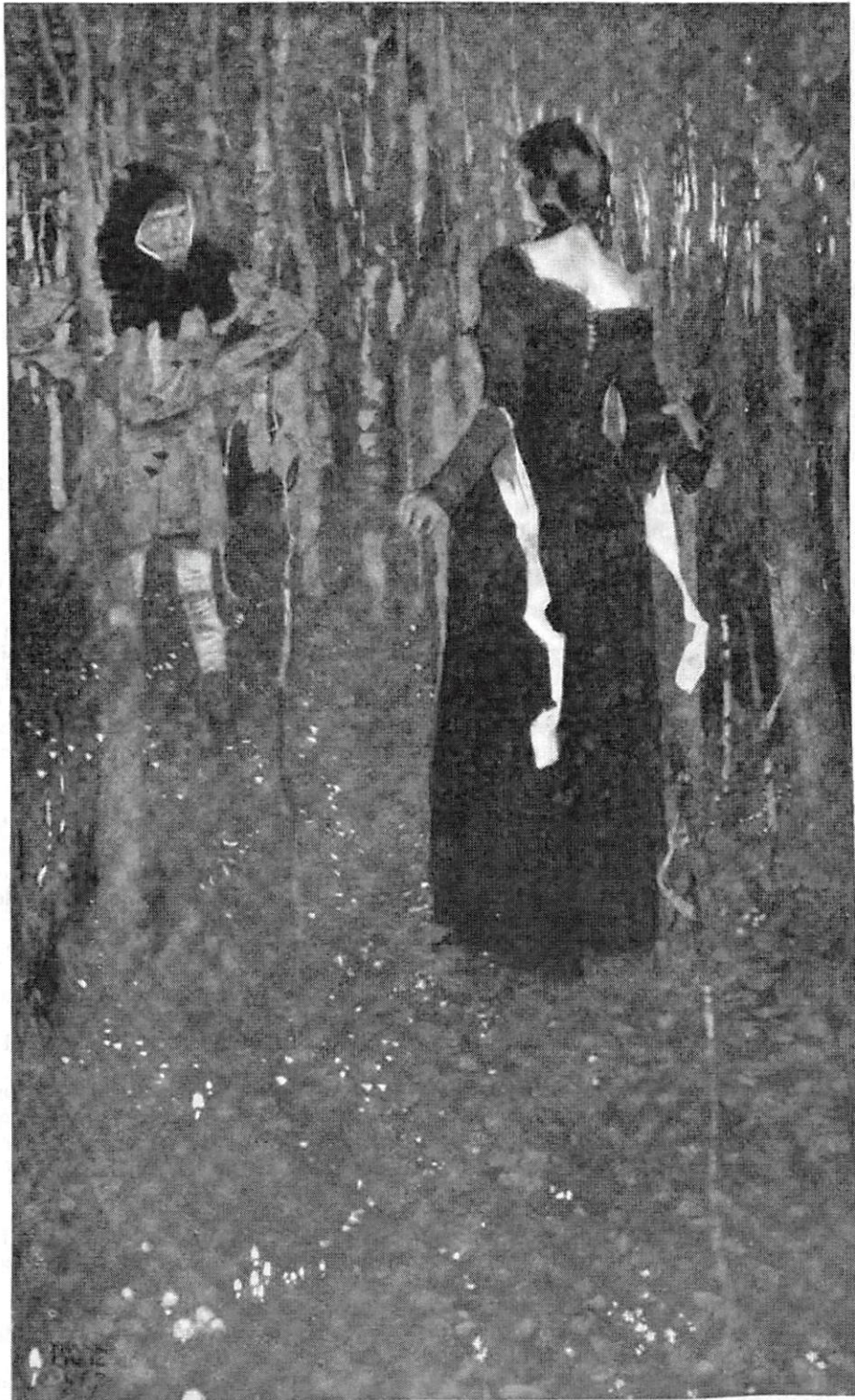
"Knot the end to the bed," he said.

"Yes, lord."

"Call when you are ready."

Guymon and his peasants had broken in, and were running shouting about the court, brandishing their scythes and bill-hooks, and calling on their Seigneur to come forth and be disposed of. Aymery, standing at the dark bending of the stair, where nothing longer than a sword could be used against him, listened to their ravings and set his teeth. The rats would scent him out and come scrambling and squeaking up the stair. Already they had seized the drunkards in the guardroom and thrown them into the moat, to wake no more.

Barbe was still working at her rope when Aymery heard the rabble rush for the tower. Up they came, shouting and swearing, pushing each other on, Guymon in his glory taking the lead. There was room for but one man at a time, and Aymery, waiting in the half darkness, gripped his sword, every



"Guymon was waiting in the beech thicket."

muscle quivering. Up they came like water gurgling and rushing up into a cave. Aymery lunged out suddenly into the dark. It was Guymon whom he smote, and who went toppling back upon the next man's head. The whole rout halted and squabbled on the stairs, swaying as those behind pushed up and those in front gave back.

A kind of blood rage seized on Aymery. He sprang down the stair, stabbing at the darkness and striking flesh. The foremost shrank from him, crowding back upon their comrades as the bodies of the vanmost came rolling and jerking down the stairs.

"Torches!" they cried, "torches!" while the mob below howled at their cowardice, and strove to push forward and thrust them on.

Aymery heard Barbe calling to him from the room. The moment seemed God-sent, for the dead bodies cumbered the stair below him. He sprang back and into the room, dashed to the door, shot the bolts, and dropped the bar. Barbe was already on the ledge of the window with the rope of sheets knotted to the bed.

Aymery was unbuckling the greaves and armpieces.

"Down, child, down!" and he flung the harness on to the bed. "Swim across, and I will follow. Quick—there is no time to lose."

She crept out through the window and hung there a minute, her white face visible to Aymery between the jambs. Then she sank down, the rope tightening and straining at the bed. Aymery had cast off his hauberk, for it was too heavy to swim in, and heard the men hammering at the door. Climbing to the ledge after buckling his sword round him, he peered over, and saw a light rippling of the water where Barbe was swimming silently across the moat. Cheered by the girl's pluck and strength, he went down the rope hand over hand, thinking each moment to find himself falling plump into the water. But Barbe's work held. He dropped with a slight splash into the moat, and struck out lustily for the further shore.

Even as he swam, Aymery could hear the mob within shouting and battering at the door of his bedchamber. He prayed fervently that the good oak might hold its stoutest, and that he and the girl might have the longer law. Nearing the bank, he found Barbe crouching under a willow and holding out a hand to him. Aymery scrambled up and shook himself, threw his arms round Barbe, and kissed her.

"Child, I love you. Come, we must reach the woods."

They took hands and ran together, looking back at the black walls of Chantylon and seeing the windows reddening with the flare of torches. A fierce yell came from the tower. The rabble had broken in and found how Barbe had cheated them.

Aymery pressed the girl's hand.

"Courage, my desire; they shall not take us."

"No, lord."

And she looked up at him, red and happy, despite her wet clothes, her peril, and the losing of her hair.

The dawn came up gloriously that day over the solemn, misty woods. The brakes were thrilling with the piping of a thousand birds, and the green lacework of the leaves glimmered against the golden east. Barbe had taken the lead that night, with Aymery trusting her, and a full moon shining. She had brought him to the hovel deep in Grosbois where Wenna the Witch had lived and died. They had found the place even as they had left it many weeks ago, save that wolves had carried away the bodies of the men. Barbe had found a flint and steel, and kindled a fire so that they might dry their clothes. She had even hunted out some salted meat, some olives, and a flask of cider, and set them with pride before Aymery her lord.

When the dawn came up, they went out into the glade together, shy and silent, wondering at the splendour of the golden woods. Aymery's eyes were very solemn, his face set in steady thought.

"Barbe!" and he reached a hand to her, gazing in her face.

She reddened and looked sad despite his tenderness.

"What will you do, lord?" she asked him quietly.

"Do?" and the generous passion in his voice made her feel glad and miserable together. "We are not out of the wood, child, yet. We must hold for Virelay and take shelter there. And then, Barbe, I will show you all my heart."

She looked at him and hung her head, reading the truth she both loved and feared.

"Lord, remember what I am."

"Barbe, I shall not remember it."

"A serf, a villein's child, not fit to be touched by you."

She covered her bosom with her hands and stood back from him, looking up bravely into his face.

"I know, lord, that by your nobleness you will bring no shame on me, and of other love there can be no dream. Do I not know what manner of thing I am, and that your children would not be men free-born. Yes, in time, lord, you would hate me, for even your generous heart could not bear so much."

She was so simple and yet so passionate that Aymery wondered at her and coveted her love the more. He had met with no such nobleness in women yet, and should he renounce it because it was not free?

"Barbe, hear me! Have you not saved my life—aye, ventured yours for it? These many days have I had you in my heart."

Her white face, pained and pleading, sobered him.

"Messire, have pity. If I had loved you not, I might think of this."

"Barbe, if you love me——"

"Yes, lord, because I love you I will be careful of your honour. You shall not mate with me, a beggar, and have the proud ones jeering at your generous heart."

Aymery dropped his hands and groaned, seeing how strong she was, how brave and honest in her love.

"You shame me, child," he said.

"Ah, no, lord; it is because you are noble that I can be brave and tell the truth."

Aymery turned and paced the grass awhile, Barbe watching him, her eyes full of that light that makes a woman more beautiful than herself. He came and faced her at last, quiet yet very tender. The *Sieur de Chantylon* was Christ's gentleman, and they were rare in those days of savagery and lust.

"Barbe, what would you have me do?"

"I would go to some fair place," she said.

"Yes."

"Where I can live in peace, think of my lord, and pray for him. Here"—and she swept her hands towards the woods—"I might mate with such a thing as Guymon; yonder I shall be a child of God."

Aymery looked at her, taking her words into the depths of his heart.

"My mother's sister is the Abbess of Morvaine. You shall lodge there if you will; they are grey nuns and good women, I have heard. Wait! Listen yet. It is not in my heart to lose you utterly."

She nodded and bade him say his say.

"I will take you to Morvaine, Barbe, to serve your year. But grant me this—the right to come to you again, and speak to you before you take the vows."

"Why should we dream of it?" she asked.

"Because," he answered, with a boyish

flashing of the eyes, "because your heart is noble, and I would make men grant your worth. Am I not *Sieur de Chantylon*, holding mesne lords at my service? I am the King's first man. I will go to him, and he shall listen."

She shook her head, yet felt his fervour sweet and noble.

"Be it as you will, messire," she said. "To Morvaine I will go as novice, and wait for you to come to me or no."

"What, Barbe, you doubt my promise?"

"No, no, lord," and her eyes were full of tears. "I am thinking that you may grant how wise I am when your heart has cooled a little and you see things as they are."

Thus Barbe and Aymery of Chantylon set out to make their way to Morvaine, ten leagues towards the south. Perilous as the paths were, God's hand seemed on them, and they came without hurt to the Abbey with its fields. Aymery made no moan over the promise he had given Barbe, but went straight to his kinswoman and told her the whole tale. And she, being a good lady, and true in her heaven's wisdom, took Barbe by the hand and kissed her forehead.

"The child has spoken nobly, son Aymery," she said. "Go, leave her with me and try your constancy. Here, we will cherish her, and she shall stay with us if God's wisdom should have it so."

And thus Barbe of the Black Hair remained at Morvaine, and Aymery, with borrowed money and a borrowed horse, rode off alone to prove his heart.

Summer and autumn went. The leaves had fallen; winter winds were whistling in the woods. To Barbe, in her grey gown, with her hair growing long again, there came a gradual sadness with the passing of the year. The sky was grey, and no birds sang, and even the love seemed mute within her heart. Next June the year of her novitiate would end. She would take the vows and cast aside her womanhood for ever.

The Abbess saw how pale the girl was growing. It seemed as though the blood were lessening in her body, the youth fire burning low with the winter cold. She pitied Barbe, but said naught to her of Aymery's love, fearing that he had repented of it and would come no more to Morvaine. It was plain to her that Barbe could not blossom in the Abbey. She pined for the old forest life, the wild moors, the free kiss of the wind.

Lent and Passion Sunday were past, and Easter flown on the wings of March. Barbe

drooped the more, grew white and thin, brooding big-eyed through the hurrying days. She had given up hope of seeing Aymery again. He had taken her words to his heart, she thought, and would come no more to the meads of Morvaine. When the roses bloomed in the Abbey garden, she, Barbe, would be a nun.

It was an April evening, with the vesper bell tolling, when a troop of horse swept out from the woods and took the meadow road towards the Abbey. Their trumpets blew as they neared Morvaine, and a banner with arms blazoned thereon flapped against the evening sky. Barbe, walking in the cloisters, heard the trumpet's bray and started. It seemed to wake deep echoes in her heart, so that she trembled and stood leaning against the wall.

She heard the gates open, the trampling of horses in the courtyard, the voices of men. Who was it who rode with such a clangour of chivalry? Barbe, her hands pressed over her bosom, stood leaning in an anguish of hope against the cloister wall.

It was there that Blanche, the Mistress of the Novices, found her when she came to call Barbe to the Abbess's parlour.

"A friend, child," she said, smiling a little sadly.

"Ah!"

"Go; they are waiting for you, and the chapel bell is ringing."

Barbe, walking like one half blind, made her way into the Abbey house. A nun met her at the door, gave her a blessing, and led

her in. Two candles were burning in the parlour, and the Abbess herself was seated before the fire. Beside her, in full harness, stood the Sieur de Chantylon.

His eyes flashed up when Barbe entered, full of the hunger of a brave man for his love. He went to her slowly, bent the knee, and kissed her hand.

"Greeting, Barbe of the Black Hair, Lady of St. Honore."

She looked at him wistfully, her face white as may-blossom, her bosom heaving.

"Lord——"

He threw out his hands to her with a great cry of joy.

"Barbe, Barbe, will you take my love?"

"Lord, I am nothing."

"No, no," and he was laughing despite his earnestness. "I have been in English lands over the sea, I have spoken with Jean our King. I have filled the pockets of his most wise clerks. Look"—and he plucked a roll of parchment from his belt—"herein is written, as fair as in Beaumanoir's great book, the King's granting of my desire, and that by law I give to Barbe of Grosbois the manor of St. Honore, and that she be known as a free-born woman, and that all rights be hers."

He paused, breathless and exultant.

"Barbe, what will you say to me?"

She burst out weeping and let him take her in his arms.

"Ah, lord, I will not be a nun."

And since the Abbess had slipped away to vespers, Aymery strengthened Barbe's worldliness with his lips.

WET APPLE TREES.

RAIN blowing through the leaves
And scattering below,
And rounded apples, wet with tears,
Soft swaying to and fro;

About the twisted tufts
Where shrivelled leaves curl round,
A little sigh, as if they, too,
Would fall upon the ground;

And on and o'er the bark
A variegated track,
White raindrops travelling down in streams
And others hanging back;

Short gleams and shafts of light
Blown sunder by the breeze,
As if some radiance lurked within
The windy apple trees.

And quivering threads of white
Entwined the branches round;
While showers of crystal drops spray out
And scatter to the ground.

Rich men have rich delights,
And sages high degrees;
I'd rather watch the wind and rain
Among the apple trees.

AGNES GROZIER HERBERTSON.

By Warwick Deeping

"She drew up within twenty paces, and let that light crossbow of hers rest on her horse's neck. It was Mellis who saw death in her eyes and knew that she had come to kill."



LOUDS of white mist were lifting from the valleys when Mellis came down through the Woolmer beech woods to see my Lord of Valence ride out for the north. The sky had cleared after three days of heavy rain, and the green earth steamed in a splendour of yellow sunlight, and each bracken frond was wet

with dew.

My lord's trumpets were sounding at Woolmer Valence, where the eight black towers of the castle rose above the white mist sheeting the moat.

"Mount ye, my gentlemen," said the trumpets; "the Red Rose is in flower again!" But the heart of Mellis was sad.

She waited by a thorn tree, a tall, thin girl, with eyes like brown pansies, and hair that fell in a black mass round her amber-brown throat. A green petticoat hung with tattered petals round her ankles, and one white shoulder showed through a rent in her smock.

Guy of Woolmer was riding ahead of his people, dressed in black armour with a bunch of red roses fastened to his helmet. A page, mounted on a brown jennet, carried my lord's spear. Mellis stood forward as he neared the thorn tree, her brown hands folded over her bosom, and her eyes looking up at him, like the shy and solemn eyes of a child.

"God speed you, lording."

My lord checked his horse and spoke to the girl. He was well-

loved in those parts, and Mellis had held the thought of him in her heart ever since he had done her a man's service one day on Simping Moor. He had thrashed two of Kate of Ravenswood's gentlemen, and carried the girl home on his horse to Mother Joan's cottage under Carberry Hill.

"Five miles on a misty morning, child, to wish me God's speed!"

She looked at him steadily with those dark and virginal eyes of hers.

"It is but a small service," she said, "for all that I owe my lord."

Guy of Woolmer pulled one of the red roses from his helmet and threw it to her. She caught the red flower and hid it in her bosom.

"Pray for me," he said with sudden, strange seriousness, and a glance that had discovered the girl's wild beauty.

"My heart and my prayers are my lord's," she answered him, as he turned and rode away.

Mellis wandered back through the bracken to the edge of the beech woods, and stood at gaze, watching Guy of Woolmer and his company of spears cross the stone bridge by the mill and take the upland road for High Mortimer. The gentlemen of the Red Rose were gathering in that little, wind-swept town before marching north together to join themselves with Henry of Richmond. The White Rose had not shown itself in those parts, and if it bloomed at all it bloomed as a flower of twilight and of treachery. Yet as Mellis watched my lord and his men, with two score sturdy archers at their backs, footing it up the sandy road to the heathlands west of the green valley, a great

Mellis

sadness possessed her. Would they return again, these men who were so debonair and so strong? Her heart was strangely disquieted within her on that summer morning when the trees and the bracken were still wet with the rain.

Now on Rust Heath, a strip of moorland lying between the Woolmer Woods and Carberry Hill, Mellis saw a woman riding a grey horse over the heather. A man in a green jerkin, and wearing a green hood, walked beside the grey horse, holding to the lady's stirrup leather, his head close to her knee. They did not see Mellis, and the girl crouched down behind a clump of gorse, for the woman on the grey horse was Kate of Ravenswood—a woman whom Mellis had good cause to fear. They passed within thirty paces of Mellis's hiding place, and my lady of Ravenswood was laughing as she went riding by. There was malice, and a sound of mockery in her laughter. Her pale eyes were set in a hard stare, and she carried her head disdainfully, like some cold, white rose, the very flower of scorn.

She and the man in green were talking together, but Mellis was too far from them to hear.

"The fools have no scent of the fox, sweet coz."

My lady turned her horse, and she and the man in green gazed westward for a while, as though watching something in the distance. Mellis raised her head and looked towards the same quarter. She saw what Kate of Ravenswood could see—the sunlight glittering on the spears and harness of an armed company upon the march. It was my Lord of Woolmer and his men moving over the distant uplands on the road to High Mortimer.

"A fair trap and ambushade, Madam."

The pale woman laughed and turned her horse.

"My lord of Woolmer was ever a slow fool. They will be snoring in High Mortimer to-night."

"And the old earl will catch them in their beds!"

Mellis lay low till they were out of sight. She had not been able to hear those sinister words, but my Lady of Ravenswood's presence there was no happy omen. It was common gossip that Madam Kate had wanted Guy of Woolmer for her man, but that her pale, bold beauty had left him cold. Doubtless she hated him now; Mellis's heart could guess at that.

She went on her way full of questioning puzzlement and a vague unrest. Why had Kate of Ravenswood ridden to Rust Heath on that particular morning? What was it to her if the men of Woolmer Valence rode through High Mortimer towards the north?

The air struck cold that night, and Joan, Mellis's foster-mother, sat on a stool in front of the fire and fed it with dead sticks. She was a queer, bearded, sombre-eyed old hag, with one black tooth hooked over her upper lip, and a nose as sharp as the beak of a bird. She had great knowledge of herbs, and people called her a witch.

Mellis had milked the two cows, and set bread upon the table; but Joan would touch no food, neither would she speak. She sat hunched in front of the fire, pulling the hairs on her chin, and staring at the flames.

"What ails you, Mother?"

"Get you to bed, girl; I see things in the fire."

Mellis drew near to her.

"What do you see, Mother?"

"I see a pale lady, with the face of death; I see blood and wounds, and men scattered like sheep."

Mellis shivered, and laid her hand over the red rose that lay hidden in her bosom.

"You see naught but evil things," she said.

"I see what I see, girl; get to bed."

Mellis went to her bed of bracken on the wooden bedstead in the cor-

ner of the inner room, but it was a long while before she fell asleep. A strange restlessness possessed her, and old Joan's words fluttered before her like sinister, black bats. She had a feeling that something tragic and terrible had happened, and that Joan had seen the horror of it in the red heart of the fire: men scattered like sheep, men bloody with their wounds, and a pale woman, with a scornful face, whose eyes gave death. Mellis could not escape from the thought of Kate of Ravenswood riding over Rust Heath and turning to watch my Lord Guy's spears flashing towards High Mortimer.

Day was breaking when Mellis awoke. She fancied that someone had called her by name, though the voice was part of a dream—a dream of baffling and fantastic terror. She had a confused memory of galloping horses and struggling men, and of one who rode with a hand over his bloody face, and who called in anguish: "Mellis! Mellis!" She started up, shivering, her eyes still big and shadowy with the menace of the dream.

"It was the voice of my dear lord!"

She had been called, and her heart answered the call; that was the simple and inspired mood of the morning. Old Joan was asleep in the far corner, and Mellis arose, dressed herself and crept barefooted out of the room. The day was very grey, misty, and strangely still, with moisture dripping from the thatch and the leaves of the trees. She had put on her leather shoes, filled a wallet with food, and tossed a Mersey cloak over her shoulders. Her eyes looked steadfastly into the grey face of the morning. It was like the face of one veiled; a face of mystery, hidden, disquieting.

The sun was shooting his yellow arrows through the mist when Mellis came to Woolmer Valence, and stood listening, with the wet bracken brushing her knees. She could see the top of the castle towers, and

over against her the sandy road that climbed from the grey bridge to the western uplands. The valley was full of a great silence, but she could hear a faint sound moving in the silence like the sound of a boy striking the trees with a stick as he wandered through a wood. The sound grew more rhythmic and definite—the beat of a horse's hoofs.

Suddenly she was aware of a horseman coming over the hill on the far side of the valley, and there was something in the look of both horse and man that made her heart beat faster. The man was lying forward on the horse's neck as though he were asleep, and the beast moved with his head down and the reins hanging, disconsolate and weary.

Mellis ran for the bridge and reached it before the man on the horse. He was either asleep or dead, his arms hanging down limply, his face hidden in the beast's mane, and she marvelled that he had not fallen by the way. He looked too like a man who had broken in haste from a desperate affair; a battered figure, sans helmet, sans arms, and with a blood-soaked scarf twisted round one leg.

The horse came down to the bridge, stared at the girl with dim and gentle eyes, and stopped dead in the middle of the road. The man on his back woke up, and nearly fell out of the saddle. His dazed eyes saw Mellis, and he cursed her, while his hand went to the place where his sword should have been.

"Out of the way!"

He kicked in the spurs and made the horse start forward, his grey face a mask of absurd terror.

"Master Leonard!"

She caught at his stirrup and ran along beside the horse.

"What has happened?"

He stared down at her stupidly, too sodden with weariness to worry about the fear he had betrayed.

"Old Joan's wench, to be sure! I have been asleep, girl. Where are we? What, at Woolmer? Holy Saints—but this fool of a horse—"

Mellis

She gripped one of his slack arms. "What has happened? Where is my lord?"

He began a rumbling tale.

"Treachery? Of course there was treachery. The Yorkists fell on us in High Mortimer, when we thought there was no Yorkist within fifty miles. We had unsaddled and gone to our lodgings. I was in The Tun in Market Street when their horse came into the town at a gallop."

"Yes, yes; but what of Sir Guy?"

The man gave a foolish laugh—but his eyes were full of the horror of it.

"What would you? Dead, good wench, dead. They were on us before we could get into our harness. I saw a big Yorkist cut my lord down as he was trying to rally some of our fellows by the church."

"Dead!" she echoed in a voice that was a whisper.

And then she loosed her hold on the stirrup leather and let the man ride on.

A little later she followed him to the castle. The bridge was down and the gate wide open; it was a panic place, like a great ship that was doomed. The man Leonard had filled it with fear and cowardice, and the great court showed a rabble of servants making haste to desert the place before the Yorkists came. Some of the men were loading up carts with food and gear. No one had the voice of a master, and the women were running about like frightened hens in a farmyard.

Mellis lay in the long grass beyond the moat and watched this rabble flow out and away over the bridge. Some were for taking refuge in Sir Peter Harbord's strong place; others spoke of making for Wanford-Town. A great scorn of them rose in Mellis's heart—these scullions and grooms and kitchen wenches; but her scorn grew the more fierce when she saw the men-at-arms and the archers of the garrison marching out with the rabble. My lord was dead, and his memory was less than a shadow.

The day was still young when Mellis passed over the bridge and through the great arch of the gate-house into the main court. The silence of the place was extraordinary. There was not a live thing to be seen, save a few pigeons fluttering about the towers, and a peacock sunning itself on the wall of my lord's garden. Mellis passed through the kitchen quarters into the great hall, and from the hall into the solar or upper room above the chapel. There had been some plundering of my lord's oak chests and armoires, and some fool had even torn the coverlet from the bed and left it to be trampled on the floor.

A great pity stirred in the girl's heart, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Cowards!"

She picked up the coverlet and replaced it upon the bed, smoothing out the creases with her brown hands.

"Not one of you stayed to pray for him."

Her maid's love and its young anguish sent her into the chapel where the sunlight flittered through the coloured glass and painted dim gules and greens upon the floor. She knelt down before the altar and made her prayer for the soul of her dear lord, her hands crossed over her bosom where the red rose of yesterday lay hidden.

Some whim took her from the chapel to the leads of the gate-house tower, where my lord's banner still waved lazily on the staff. She lowered the banner, unfastened it from the rope, and was wrapping the splendour of it about her body, when she saw something moving on the road in the valley. The sunlight was in her eyes, and shading them with her hand she saw the man whom the world thought dead riding his black horse towards the bridge.

Mellis forgot all else in a rush of joy and wonder. She was there on the bridge to meet him, the blues and reds and purples of the great banner blazoned about her body.

By Warwick Deeping

"My lord, my lord!"

He sat in the saddle, staring at her, a ghost of a man, with a blood-stained face, his harness muddy and rusty, his eyes dim and sunken.

"Mellis!"

He tried to dismount, and fell into the girl's arms.

"My God, get me some water, child. Where are they all?"

Her brown and well-knit body was his from that moment. Her strength served. She put an arm about him and helped him in.

"They have fled."

"Fled! All?"

"Cowards! Master Leonard rode in with the news that you were dead!"

"But you are here, child."

"I stayed to pray for the soul of my lord."

She set him down on a bench in the courtyard and brought him a cup of water mixed with red wine. He drank eagerly, and with such greediness that her heart went out to him in his distress.

"Thanks—Mellis."

He was so feeble and so battered that he could hardly set the cup down on the bench. She took it from him, and bethought her of his needs. Again her girl's strength saved. She got him across the courtyard, through the great hall, and up the stairs to the solar, and he was like wax in her brown hands—a broken thing that cried out for sleep.

"Let me lie, child."

He fell asleep while she was unbuckling his harness, like a man overcome with strong wine; but Mellis handled him as a mother handles a child. She stripped off his harness, turning him as he lay, and searching out his wounds, brought linen and clean water, and washed and dressed his wounds while he slept. And all the while her heart was big with a great and exultant tenderness.

The day passed and the night came. Guy of Woolmer still slept;

he had woken but once, and Mellis had given him wine and food, and he had fallen asleep again like a tired swimmer sinking in the sea.

Mellis had found his horse wandering in the courtyard, and had stabled the beast and fed and watered him. She had tried to raise the drawbridge, but her strength had failed to turn the handle of the great winch, and she had had to content herself with lowering the portcullis and closing the gates. There was a truckle bed in my lord's room, a bed that had been used by his page, and she lay down there to rest.

"I shall not sleep," she said to herself, but nature willed it otherwise.

The day was breaking when Mellis was roused by the sound of a trumpet. She started up and sat listening, but heard only Sir Guy's heavy breathing. A sudden fear and her own quick wits sent her running to the gate-house, where she climbed the turret stair and looked out through one of the squints in the wall. That trumpet-call had been no part of a dream. Massed at the bridgehead stood a great company of men-at-arms, all grey in the mists of the morning, their spears bristling thick as young trees in a wood. She saw a man cross the bridge and try the gates, and she waited for no more.

"My lord! My lord!"

He sat up, still heavy with sleep.

"My lord, the Yorkists are here. They are at the bridge and will break in. Hide! hide!"

He stood up, swaying, and then steadied himself with a hand on her shoulder.

"They are here! Why did I sleep? This place is nothing but a trap, and you and I——"

They heard the noise and heavy blows upon the gate.

"My lord, where shall I hide you? They are breaking in."

He seemed to take a new grip on his manhood as he looked down into her face.

Mellis

"We may fool them yet. There is old Bryan's secret way. Come."

He took one of her hands and like grown children playing some grim game of hide-and-seek they went down a little stair that led into the chapel. They could hear shouting, and a trampling of horses on the bridge. There was a painted screen above the altar of the chapel, and on the centre panel the Holy Virgin, wearing a crown of gold, held the child Christ in her lap. Guy knelt upon the altar, pressed a painted jewel in the Virgin's breast, and the panel opened, showing a narrow passage and the stone steps of a stairway.

"It will be blind man's buff for us, child. I'll go first."

When the altar panel had closed on them, the place was a mere black pit, an oozing, slimy tunnel that burrowed below the moat. Guy put an arm about the girl and groped with his other hand along the wall. It was ten years since he had explored the passage by the light of a torch, and he prayed now most fiercely that the Yorkists did not know of this bolt-hole. Mellis's warm body touched his as they moved through the darkness. He felt her hair brushing against his cheek, and of a sudden he knew that he loved her.

Old Bryan's passage came to the light again in a tangled thicket of old thorns a good two furlongs from the moat. Its narrow, stone door opened out on a sloping bank, and this door had been kept covered with a thin layer of turf. The stone had not been moved for ten years, and at the first push Guy of Woolmer could not shift it, nor did his dagger help matters when he worked the point of it in between the stone door and the frame.

"Rusty hinges! Put your hands here, sweetheart."

"I'm strong," she said; "almost as strong as a man."

Their two bodies became like one in that narrow place as they strove to move the stone. It swung for-

ward at last with a jerk, letting in light and a glimpse of brown soil and green grass, and the clean and blessed smell of the morning.

"God be thanked."

One of her brown arms was round his neck, and her mouth almost touching his, for they had been pressing against the door with their shoulders, and standing face to face.

"Dear, you have given me life."

Her dark eyes held his, and there was a new wonder in them, and a sudden soft shyness.

"I give but what my lord has given me," she said.

Guy pushed his way out into the thicket of thorns and crawled through the bracken and the brambles till he had a view of the valley. Mellis had followed and lay there beside him like a wild mate, her chin resting on her hands. There was still some mist hanging about the valley, but Guy could see all that he needed to see—that the Yorkists were crowding across the bridge, and that this bolt-hole seemed unguarded.

He turned and spoke to her.

"Child, it would be death for you to be taken with me. For your sake I'll not risk it. Leave that banner here with me and walk straight for the woods."

"And what of you, my lord?"

"I shall take my chance," he said, "when I have seen you reach safety. They will be busy with plunder down yonder and may not see you. Besides, even if you are stopped and questioned, you are no more than a country girl and they will let you pass."

Mellis's eyes held his.

"My lord is still weak with his wounds," she said, "and I know all the forest paths. I stay with my lord."

"Mellis—I'll not have it so."

"Have I not served you well?"

"Child, if it means death for me, so be it; but for you—no. Quick! we are wasting precious time."

She was obstinate and not to be moved.

By Warwick Deeping

"I stay with my lord. I am no coward. I know all the forest ways; where my lord may hide; where food is to be had."

He looked long into her eyes, and suddenly he raised one of those brown hands of hers and kissed it.

"In life and in death," he said, "the debt is mine."

She stood up and unwrapping the banner from about her shoulders left it lying in the grass. Then they went out together from the shadow of the thorns and walked at a steady pace towards the woods, making no show of haste, but going unconcernedly, like country folk who had nothing to fear.

Kate of Ravenswood sat on her grey horse in the courtyard of Woolmer Valence, a grande dame *sans merci*, while Earl Brandon's men searched the place.

An esquire of Brandon's came and reported.

"Woolmer has slept here, sir. The bed has been used, and his harness is strewn about."

"Find him," said the earl.

My Lady of Ravenswood grew impatient.

"There was some gossip of a secret way. Your men are watching the valley?"

"A man who has lost all the blood out of his body cannot run far, Madam."

"But he can lie hid in a hole like a rat."

An archer in a leather jerkin and steel hat, and wearing my Lord of Brandon's badge, came running up.

"A man and a wench, lording, have come out of a thicket of thorns and taken to the woods."

"Did you not stop them?"

"They looked guilty of nothing, lording, and they seemed in no hurry to be gone. At two furlongs they had the look of a couple of beggars."

Kate of Ravenswood turned her horse with a cry of impatience.

"Fool, and you did not run to look in that thicket! My lord, send

some of your men after me. And come with me, Master Archer."

She bade him break in among the thorn trees and see what he could find, and almost the first thing he stumbled on was the Woolmer banner that Mellis had left.

He came bounding back. "The foxes are out of the earth. I have seen their hole in the thicket."

Kate of Ravenswood's face was the face of a fury.

"Take a message to the earl. Say that I am hot on the trail, and bid him mount and follow."

She was carrying a light crossbow, and she galloped off towards the woods, old Joan's pale lady with the face of death.

In those Woolmer Woods my Lord Guy's strength came back to him, and he lost the smart and the stiffness of his wounds. Mellis gave him bread to eat from her wallet.

"They have no dogs," she said, "and we can fool them if my lord's strength will hold."

"I have a new heart in me to-day, Mellis. Where are you taking us?"

"To Carberry Hill," she said; "I know a place there where my lord could never be found."

Chance or a strange Providence willed it that a woman should take the adventure out of the hands of the men. My Lady of Ravenswood knew the ways almost as well as Mellis, and she rode straight into Woolmer Great Ride, not waiting for old Brandon and his company. The Great Ride cut through the woods to Rust Heath and touched that wide stretch of furze and heather between the pines of Carberry and the Beeches of Woolmer Valence. She galloped the three miles to Rust Heath, and waited on the edge of the wood, a woman whose pale eyes were eager to kill.

Mellis and her man were making a dash over the heather for the glooms of the Carberry pines when they heard a horse coming at a gallop. They turned and stood at gaze, and saw my lady on her grey horse riding down alone on them.

Mellis

She drew up within twenty paces, and let that light crossbow of hers rest on her horse's neck. It was Mellis who saw death in her eyes and knew that she had come to kill.

"My Lord, she will have no pity."

Guy of Woolmer looked at the girl beside him and understood.

"Go," he said; "if there be hell in a woman's heart, the debt is mine."

But Mellis did not move.

Kate of Ravenswood rode near and mocked them.

"Good day to you, Sir Guy. You run well with that bow-legged hussy of yours. Have you forgotten how I can shoot with a bow?"

He stood looking at her, and with great scorn.

"Nor how you change your colour, Madam Kate."

Her pale eyes flashed at him.

"The wench first!"

Guy sprang forward, but that bow of hers sent its bolt whirring into the body of the girl who had stood at his side. He heard Mellis give a cry. Then a madness took him, the rage of a man whose love-mate has been struck down. He rushed at Kate of Ravenswood and struck her horse with his dagger till the great beast reared high, and fell with his mistress under him.

For a moment Guy of Woolmer stood staring. The horse had rolled aside, scrambled up, and gone galloping over the heather; but the woman lay there in a queer, stark heap, her head twisted awry, her lips drawn back over her teeth. The horse had killed her—old Joan's pale lady with the face of death.

But Woolmer's heart was where his love lay bleeding, stretched upon the heather.

"Mellis!"

"My dear Lord, tarry not here for me."

He was greatly moved.

"Mellis, you and I take death or life together. Is there no help near?"

"If you could take me in your arms, dear Lord, and carry me in-

to Carberry Woods. It is not death with me yet."

"I could carry you to the end of the earth," he said.

And then help came, the strangest help that a man ever dreamed of. Guy of Woolmer saw a little, old woman hobbling towards them under the pines, a little, old woman with a grey beard on chin and a nose like a beak of a bird. It was Joan, Mellis's foster-mother.

"Set her down my son," she said; "did I not see it all in the fire?"

Woolmer stood aside, astonished, and watched Joan kneel down beside the girl. She had linen and a wad of green leaves and a couple of little stone bottles in her basket.

"Dear Saints, but there is no dead woman here. Hold your breath and set your teeth, child. And here's the cause of the mischief, nicely turned by a pair of good ribs."

She dressed Mellis's wound, while Guy of Woolmer kept watch.

Joan was holding up one of those stone bottles, and she bade him drink.

"You will be ready to carry the moon," she said, "with a little of that inside you."

And so it proved. He took Mellis again in his arms, and following the old woman, carried her into the deeps of the Carberry pines.

"Where are you leading us, Mother?" he asked her.

"To a place where ghosts lived, and where no one will find you."

She was as good as her word, and that night Guy of Woolmer lay on a bed of bracken under the mound of the great barrow in Carberry Woods.

Close to him lay Mellis, very weary, and in a deep sleep. One of her brown hands was held fast in his, and he had slipped his signet ring upon one of her fingers. Overhead the night wind made a murmur in the tops of the pines, but all that the man heard was the sound of the girl's breathing.

WARWICK DEEPING.

From Harper's Monthly May 1904

The Black Death

BY WARWICK DEEPING

AHAZE of heat shimmered in golden vapor over the woods. The great blue arch of heaven was as a fiery dome burnished and welded by the noon strength of the sun. In the pastures the sheep were huddled under the trees; kine stood knee-deep in the miry pools; the highways reeked with gray-white dust. A great silence seemed to weigh like a doom upon the bosom of the day. There were no laborers in the fields, no shepherds in the pastures.

The noon siin beat on Castle Sagrazant, glimmering on the stagnant water in the moat, carving gaunt shadows under the burning walls. In the castle garth the grass was brown even under the canopies of the trees, the flowers drooped their purple cowls, the young fruit rotted upon the boughs. Overhead, the sun was as a giant sphere of molten gold flinging a fiery rain upon the world. The birds were songless in the deepest thickets; a vast languor burdened the summer's heart.

Before the great gate of Castle Sagrazant seven brown mounds crumbled under the sun. There were seven graves newly risen from the grass. An open trench yawned by the seventh grave, a white-swathed corpse lying therein. By the brim of the unfilled trench a man lay prone, with a mattock crosswise under his chest. He was motionless as stone under the unpitying sun; death had smitten him ere he could bury the dead.

In the castle court a wolfhound crouched under the shade of a wall. High up in the tower a woman stood at an open casement, her black hair dishevelled about her face, a veil shot through by the sun. Her purple gown was bare to her bosom. Her dusky eyes were like amethysts set in a marble mask. She stood and gazed on the desolate land, a mute despair on her wasted face.

On the fevered air came a querulous howl, the wild cry of a brute beast in pain. The woman at the window heard it and shuddered. She saw the graves by the great gate, the dead man stretched on the parched brown grass. There was no hope in the heavens, no pity on the florid face of the sun. Life seemed a cup of molten metal lifted mockingly to her voiceless lips.

She turned back suddenly with rippling hair, and went to kneel by a carved cradle. Deep-bosomed shadows overarched the room. In the cradle lay a little child, ashy of face and dull of eye. The woman stretched her arms over it with a great gesture of woe. Her hair poured down on the dead child's face. She knelt

there like one smitten dumb by grief, while the sunbeams fenced with the black-browed shadows. Solitude abode with her in that house of death; a great silence covered it like a golden pall.

The day dragged its burning sandals over the hills. Evening, with her calm moon's face, rose up in the east, setting the stars in place with her silent hands. A vast hush awed the sable woods. In the west the last crimson cry of the sun had sounded, as he sank with his red wounds over the world. The dew was loosed from the melting sky. Night, triumphant, poured balm on the earth's burnt breast.

By the cradle the woman had stiffened suddenly, like one who hears a lover's voice under the stars. Her face shone white in the twilight amid the purple masses of her hair. Her great eyes were full of a preternatural glory. There were armed men riding out of the east; she heard their horses trample the bridge. A clarion clamored before the gate. At such an hour should her husband return.

Dame Isabeau, with quivering lips, brooched her gown at her white throat and descended the stair to the castle court. The wolfhound lying on the stones crawled near and licked her hand as she passed. Climbing the stair that led to the gallery above the gate, she put her loosened hair from off her forehead and gazed over the battlements towards the deepening night.

There were twenty spears in the road below, rising black and straight against the sky. Armor gleamed towards the setting sun, plumes blew, bassinets caught the fire from the west. On the bridge was a knight on a great gray horse, his head unhelmed, his long sword drawn. His surcoat rose red from his horse's gray flanks; the shield on his arm bore gules and a dragon of green.

As Isabeau gazed on this silent troop she fingered her throat and went white as the moon. The man on the bridge tossed up his sword. He was big and burly, black of beard. His eyes caught the flame of the fading sky; there was an unclean smile on his hairy mouth.

"Ha, Madame Isabeau," he said, "Geoffrey of Lisiac waits at your gate."

The dame on the wall tilted up her chin. She had a thin distrust on her tear-stained face. The spears below seemed to mock her pride.

"Geoffrey of Lisiac," she answered him there, "what brings you here to my tower to-night?"

The man headed his gray horse nearer the gate. There was dust on his harness and sweat on his brow.

"Madame," he said, in his curt, suave way, " the black death is with you; your tower is a charnel-house. Shall the white rose rot in the castle garth? We have no plague on the Lisiac hills."

"Knight Geoffrey," said the lady, clutching the stones, " though my house is a charnel - house, should I forswear it? My child lies dead in his cradle above."

The man on the horse smiled up at her there. He was young and lusty, lean in the loins. Passion brandished a torch before his eyes; the red light flickered over his face.

"White rose," he said, with muffled tones, " shall I speak to you of the days of yore when I carried your token upon my casque?"

" Ah," she said, " those were idle hours. Pity me, Geoffrey, for I grieve to-night."

" Youth comforts youth," said the man at the gate; " life draws no rusty chain round our souls. Of yore I saw you a white-robed rose, unclasped and unknissed save by sun and moon. You forbade me of old. What stands 'twixt us now?"

She hoarded her pride and her cold white look. Her eyes dilated as she answered his prayer.

" Of the past, Geoffrey, I have no thought. I am wife and mother. Let me be."

"But," he cried, "you parley with death. I see the graves and the dead man here. Look down! Am I clay in my surcoat of red? My heart is this color. Choose, Isabeau, choose."

" Simon returns," she said at last.

"Simon!" he cried, "a spoil-sport fool! He is dead in Zion, I have heard men say. It is twelve long months since he took the cross. The deserts and the pagans have done the rest."

Her eyes flashed at him over the wall. His words had touched the core of her heart. His taunts were her fears; his passion, her plague.

" Simon, my husband, will return," she said.

He scoffed in her face with passionate zeal.

" Your love is as wasted wine," he cried; " you keep faith with a fool who cares not a jot whether you droop and fester in pestilent walls. The pagan girls have eyes like the stars."

She did not debate with him, but cherished her scorn. The west was melting; the night hurried on.

" Mohammed's daughters are fair," he said; "this errant of yours has found them so."

"Liar!"

The word set the man's face ablaze in the twilight. He tossed up his sword to her and licked his lips.

" Come down to me here," he said, " or, by heaven and hell, I will break the gate!"

She cried out in terror at the look on his face.

" Geoffrey," she said, " have pity. I am worn with tears. You were not thus with me in the days of old."

" Let the dead years rot," he cried, with a snarl. " I take you to Lisiac tower a to-night."

Isabeau fled from him. suddenly with twisting mouth, great fear in her heart of the man at the gate. She heard them gather upon the bridge, the clangor of arms, the groan of the wood. Panting, she ran across the court, climbed the tower stair, stumbling and clutching at the walls. The chamber was won where the dead child lay; she stood at the casement as the din grew below. Overhead the dark night was arustle with stars. A cool breeze played upon her face. She heard the gate give; saw swords smite through, gleam in the twilight like beams from the moon.

A sudden thought seized her as she stood. Taking a breviary from a shelf, she tore a half-lettered page therefrom. A quill and inkhorn lay in an ambry in the wall. With quaking hand she scrawled on the page blurred, hastening letters that fell as in panic from the pen. Geoffrey and his riders were crowding in the court. She heard the yelp of the smitten hound when Geoffrey's swordpoint pierced its throat. Quick with terror, she took the page, tucked it beneath the crucifix on the wall, so that it hung there like a text in the gloom. Already the men were on the stairs. She flung herself across the cradle, so that her white face touched the child's.

Geoffrey of Lisiac, breathing hard, came in with his rout and found her thus. He seized her shoulders through the cloak of her hair and strove to drag her away from the child. In the struggle the cradle was overturned on the floor; the child fell forth, a snowflake shunning the breath of lust. Geoffrey lifted Isabeau up in his arms and bore her from Sagrazant, out by the graves, where the broken gate gaped towards the rising moon.

As the dawn came over the woods, smiting with a golden kiss each sleeping tree, a man in a ragged cloak of gray, with a holly staff in his hand, trudged up the sandy road towards Sagrazant on the hill. A mask of white cloth covered his face, giving view alone of his glistening eyes. His sandals were gray with the dust from the road as he turned and strode over the billowy meadows.

Sagrazant's tower showed in the woods, its battlements echoing the flash of the

dawn. A long white cloud, like a banner, streamed from the tower, as though flying a welcome to the man in gray. At the first sight of his home he knelt on a hillock with folded arms. A gust of passion seemed to shake his frame, for he swayed as he knelt, like a tree in a wind. The sky ran blue above his head as he passed on slowly over the meads.

The first response to the pilgrim's prayer was the broken gate of his own hold. Rent and torn, it hung on its hinges, a grim text on the lips of love. The man saw the graves in the grass by the moat, the corpse stiff by the unfilled trench. The place was still as a rifled tomb. A strange awe encircled its very walls.

Simon of Sagrazant knelt down in the dust and buried his masked face in the sleeves of his gown. The graves in the grass, what knowledge was theirs? The broken gate, the silent walls, the staff with no banner adroop at its throat, all were as prophecies, warning his soul. From gate to tower, from tower to moat, his eyes wandered with empty desire.

Anon he rose up and entered in. The hound lay stretched within the gate, his blood like some purple moss on the stones. Simon touched the hairy head that had bayed him welcome in the days of yore. The dog at least had been true to the death. Climbing the stairway, he searched the tower. Its chambers were dark and dumb with mystery; they were garnished with memories rich and sad; the man's heart hurried as he searched them through.

He came at last to Dame Isabeau's room, to falter on the threshold like one afraid. Some woe lurked as poison in the wine of life; he dreaded to lift the cup to his lips.

The room was full of a sullen gloom as he thrust the door open and entered in. On the floor, by the overturned cradle, lay the child, half covered by the folds of a scarlet quilt. Simon knelt down and stared it over. It was his in death, though in life he had never heard its cry nor taken its hands into his father's heart. He laid the body again in the cradle and covered it with the scarlet quilt.

It was the face of his love that haunted him, that white face, pearl-bright under raven hair. He searched the chamber through and through, saw the scrawl

beneath the crucifix, and plucked it down. He strode to the casement till the sun bathed his hands. The words on the page burnt in his brain:

"Of Geoffrey of Lisiac I am dishonored," they ran. "Save me, good husband, if you should come."

Thrice Sir Simon read the scrawl through before he thrust it away under his cloak. Slowly he passed down the winding stair, sad as the moon over winter woods. In his own great hall he found a chest where arms had been stored when his bride was young. He broke the catch with his pilgrim's knife, gazed in the depths, and smiled as he gazed. From the chest he drew a good bassinet, steel coat and shoulder-plates, greaves and shoes. A great sword quivered up in the sun; an iron-bound shield lay on his knees. He sat him down on an oaken settle, laced on the harness with steady hands. Then over the whole he cast cloak, cowl, and mask, and, leaving Sagrazant, passed out towards the woods.

At Lisiac towers the tall pines swayed under the moon where the moorlands swept to the murk of the woods. The night rang shrill with the noise of the wind, the creaking of boughs, the hissing of grass. Clouds swept fitfully over the sky; the stars peered through veils of wind-worn silver. Owls hooted and the nightjar croaked. The voice of the forest was as the voice of the sea.

In Lisiac hall flambeaux flared on the walls. The raftered roof was huge with gloom, aswirl with smoke from the torchflare below. The rushes were clean upon the floor, the dais bedizened with scarlet cloth, the tables laden with charger and cup. From corbel and beam carved faces grinned on the scene beneath. The pennons waved with the draught through the door.

In Lisiac hall there was much flowing of wine, a rich tide to stifle the voice of death. Many a pale mouth touched the cup. There was dread in the blustering of the wind as it shook the casements and moaned in the tower. Roland, the squire, had died that day, with purple face and noisome skin. They had

buried him deep in the silent woods. The black death waited at Lisiac gates.

On the dais, in his great carved chair of oak, sat Geoffrey, the knight, in a robe of green. The chair was studded with golden nails; a great red banner waved overhead. At his side sat Isabeau, Simon's wife, in a gown of purple and a chain of pearls. There was a wasted woe in her bloodless lips; her eyes were dull as with unshed tears; the deepened shadows told their tale.

Knight Geoffrey had ordered a feast that night, to keep the black death out of his spoilers' heart. Wine and mead had flushed his men's souls; they were brisk and merry despite the wind. Lutes chattered lightly from the minstrels' bench; viol and flute set the rafters humming. Geoffrey himself kept his cupbearer busy. Like a feverish gamester he staked against death.

At the end of the board, below the salt, where the meaner guests had their benches, a pilgrim sat in his gown of gray. A mask of white cloth covered his face, and he kept his cowl down despite the hour. It was a vow, he said to those at the board, a vow to St. Jude in penance for crime. At his right hand sat a burly friar, red of jowl and loose of lip. The brown horn had outpaced the churchman's prayers. No man drank on the pilgrim's left. He was a surly soul, and chary of words.

Dame Isabeau watched from her carved oak chair like one whose heart was cold as stone. The clamor and music, the kiss of cups, were mocking rhymes on the tongue of shame. The hall was as an unclean pool at her feet. She had turned to Knight Geoffrey and besought a boon, that he would spare her the jeers and the jests. The man's face was flushed above his beard. When she pleaded he pinched her arm and laughed, breathed in her face with heavy breath. The loathing grew in her as he drank; and the hate in her eyes was as fire through glass.

The wind blustered overhead as though challenging those within. The casements shivered, the hangings waved. Midnight was near and the cups still passed. Only the pilgrim would touch no wine, shielding his temperance behind a vow. The fat friar slept with his head on his hands; men were slipping under the benches; the rushes were soiled with the lees of the feast.

Geoffrey of Lisiac slouched in his chair. He called for a song from the drunken choir while the silver goblet shook in his hand. Stretching out, he caught Dame Isabeau by a tress of the hair. He was mouthing words in her ivory ear as she strained aside with twisting face. Knotting her hair about his wrist, the man drew her towards him with drunken strength. "A sudden screech came from the hall, like the cry of a man whom black wolves rend. The pilgrim in gray had cast his skin; a great sword leaped to the smokegrimed roof. Geoffrey, loosing Dame Isabeau's hair, struggled up and stared at the man in steel.

Simon of Sagrazant made no debate; his shield was up, his sword a gleam. He smote right and left as the drunkards gathered, blows that rang and rent and slew. The hall was aboil with drunken men. They heaved up benches to beat him down, clutched and snatched at the leaping sword. A Titan's strength seemed to tread the hall, and their fuddled wits were like leaves in a wind.

None but Geoffrey withstood him at last, for he had maimed or slain them man by man. Lisiac's lord had taken a spear from the wall. Leaping down before the dais, he charged and lunged at Simon's throat. The great sword cut the lance staff short, and Geoffrey, clubbing the broken spear, smote at Sir Simon hard and fast. The knight of Sagrazant bided his time as they stamped and panted over the rushes. By the great fireplace Geoffrey sprang in, smote wide, and met Sir Simon's steel.

The great sword slid down the staff of the spear, severed both hands at the wrists with the blow. Struck on the jaw with Simon's fist, Lisiac's lord rolled back on the flames. The red blood hissed and steamed on the fire. With the smitten man's struggles the embers flew out, set the dry rushes in a blaze. Flames curled along the timbered floor, and ran up the hangings like wriggling snakes towards the roof.

Simon of Sagrazant ran to the dais, where Dame Isabeau sat in her carven chair, stiff as an image upon a tomb. She

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rose to him suddenly with open mouth, a great desire in her frightened eyes. The flames danced across the hall; smoke billowed up to the shadowy roof.

"Isabeau, wife!" cried the man in steel.

She started, fell forward, and clasped his knees, her hair like a black pennon blown by the fire. Simon lifted her up in his sinewy arms. He strode through the hall over carcass and bench, while Geoffrey writhed in a lake of flame. Isabeau's arms were round his neck as he pushed through the door to the gloomy court, where the moon swam above in a dishevelled sky.

"Simon," she said, as he set her down, "God bless thee, husband. I am saved from hell."

He sheathed his sword and unbarred the gate. A lurid crown began to gather on the castle's brows; pennons of flame ran out from the walls. The wind and the fire sang a glee together.

Simon and Isabeau passed out hand in hand. The black woods called to them under the moon. They turned away from Lisiac's tower, where the fire was purging the black death out.

Red was the sky above the pines when Simon and Isabeau fled away. A sudden sunset startled the trees, wreathing their limbs in scarlet flame. The forest gloom was studded with death moaned through on the wings of the wind.

The moon stood white overhead as they came from the thickets towards the moor. The thousand spires were silvered bright; far off a river gleamed in the gloom. Over the moon the clouds sped fast, frowning and smiling over the world. Lisiac tower, a tuft of flame, blossomed like a torch - lily above the trees.

Simon and Isabeau went hand in hand. The man was silent, as though weary or faint. He never looked down in his wife's face, but stared at the stars and the

silvery clouds. Her hand lay cold within his palm, and she lagged a little as they crossed the moor.

" Simon, dear heart," she said at length, pressing her body close to his.

He stiffened of a sudden, as though in pain, and wound his fingers about her wrist. The mask on his face shone white

towards the moon. The eyes glistened through with a strange unrest.

" Simon," she said, with tremulous mouth, " why do you hide your face from me?"

" Wife." he said, with straining hand, " have patience awhile. I will tell you all."

They had passed the moor and came to a wood where beeches circled a little lake. Wild roses starred the brushwood banks; the scent of thyme was on the air. The moonlight flickered through the leaves. A perfumed silence crowned the gloom.

" Simon!" she said, with sudden fear.

He felt her body slack in his arm as he stood and turned her face to his. A sudden fever shook her frame; her lips grew parched, her eyes full of dread.

" Simon," she said, " I am athirst. There is a hot pain twisting over my brow. A hand of ice seems over my heart."

Straightway he took her up in his arms and bore her into the darkening wood. Treading slowly under the trees, with her hot cheek laid on his shoulder-plate, he came to the rim of the little lake where the water lapped amid the sedge. He laid her down on the heather there, unlaced his casque, and knelt by the lake. The cup touched her fevered mouth; she drank of the water; her hands hung down.

" Simon," she said, with her head on his breast, " the black death has me. Leave me and fly."

He drew her closer within his arms, bent over her face and touched her hair.

" Should I fear death ?" he said, anon.

" Ah, husband mine, the plague will part us."

" Not yet, wife Isabeau."

" If you love me, go," she pleaded; " my breath is a pestilence. Leave me here."

He was silent awhile like a man who prays. The great stars watched them betwixt the clouds. There was an autumn flush on the woman's cheeks, a rosy gloom amid her hair.

" Simon," she said, " I am more than death."

He gave a great cry and hid his face. The water rippled out of the dusk, a silver streak, frail and fair.

" Wife," he whispered, " what if death is near? I fear it not now. Gaze on my face."

She turned in his arms and stared at the mask. There was a wistful glory in her eyes, a strange smile upon her mouth.

" Dear heart," she said, " I have guessed the truth. What matters it now, since I shall die?"

" Ah, Isabeau, I am a leper," he cried.

" God keep you, husband, I love you the more."

He laid him down on the grass at her side, while the wind blew the boughs above their heads. Their arms were twined round each other's necks. Sir Simon kissed her and said no more.

Thus it befell, when a third sun set, peasant folk wandering in search of wood found a knight and lady side by side dead on the heather, their eyes towards the sun. The black death had taken the one away; the other lay still with a sword in his heart. They buried them there, for fear of the plague, and set the knight's sword betwixt the two graves.

Prophet

(31)

THE SECRET ORCHARD

By WARWICK DEEPING

Illustrated by Allan Stewart



RICHARDSKELTON rode armed, for the Black Death was abroad, and the Black Death meant hunger and despair in the forest, and the madness of men who had become as wild beasts.

Yet it was Death in a green season, and a man might marvel at the ways of God. The great oaks were budding out into bronze and gold, and the green shimmer of beech leaves had wiped out the purple winter gloom. At sunset birds sang against a yellow sky. Above the brown wreckage of last year's leaves a thousand flowers were blooming.

All through the day, on the forest road, Skelton had heard the cuckoo calling, a strange voice in the hush of the woods. Birds sang their spring song, and yet Death walked there in the green alleys and sat beside the brown water of the forest streams. Nor was Death here a noble figure, but a lean, snarling, starved lousel, ready to stab and to rob through sheer hunger.

Skelton had a broken arrow hanging in a fold of his green surcoat. It had been loosed at him that morning from behind a tree, and had snapped against his harness, and Skelton had left it there for luck. He rode with basinet on head, his long spear over his shoulder. The bay horse he rode had its harness of red leather studded with bosses of burnished steel.

"Come now," said he to himself, "may Our Lady confound that rogue of a hedge priest! What was it—right or left by the three thorns? Send me to Mount Carmel, but I have forgotten!"

His brown face looked grave and a little grim. The forest was not merciful to strangers, even when a haughty and adventurous spirit looked at life out of shrewd, steel-bright eyes.

"At the stone cross by the three thorns

on the heath? Yes, to be sure. And I gave the lousel a groat! '*Par tecum*, lording. A silver groat for a brown pocket.' And then someone loosed that arrow!"

He frowned a young man's frown, remembering the harsh voice of the strolling priest, and the quick, red-eyed glances that the fellow had shot at him from under his brown cowl. Here was the heath, sure enough, rising in rusty purple and green out of the deeper murk of the woods. Great white clouds came out of the south, and northwards before him he saw the stone cross and the three wind-blown thorns outlined against the blue of the sky-line. The road forked by the three thorns.

Mounting the hill, he saw a figure in blue seated at the foot of the stone cross. The man sat huddled up as though asleep, his hood drawn forward over his face. Beside him lay a lute, a leather wallet, and a stout staff. The sunlight, streaming from behind two cloud masses, fell full upon the heath, but the thorn trees threw three patches of ragged shadow, and one of the shadow patches covered the man by the cross.

"Hallo, there!"

The man in blue still slept. Skelton could see the black peak of a pointed beard jutting out under the hood. The man's hands were clenched upon his girdle. There was something bleak and stiff in the way his legs lay thrust out from under the blue cloak.

"Wake up, friend, wake up!"

Skelton swung his spear and prodded the figure in the ribs. The man did not stir. Skelton's mouth tightened and his brows came closer together. Catching the edge of the hood on his spear-point, he lifted it up and back, and then sat staring at the dead man's face. It was a parched, grey mask, all blue about the mouth and eyes. The nostrils sneered, the lips were drawn back over the teeth. Skelton crossed himself and backed his horse.

"Poor rogue! Half starved even in running away, and then the Black Death caught

him. He'll sing no more romances. He is dead, with Tristram and Isolt."

Skelton sat staring, puzzled in the midst of his pity.

"Ah, my friend, we cannot help each other, unless I put up a few prayers. To the right or to the left? Which shall it be?"

He chose the right, and left the dead man sneezing at the foot of the cross.

The road tricked Skelton as only a forest road can trick a stranger, luring him some six miles from the three thorns, only to branch into three vague and dubious tracks. Wooded hill hung beyond wooded hill, the ashen grey trunks of the beeches rising from a blue and bronze floor of dead leaves and wild hyacinths. A great hush held, yet Skelton could fancy that he heard a murmur like the sound heard in a hollow shell.

Sudden and from a great distance came a strange cry—a thin, small sound in the vastness of the forest. Skelton's horse pricked up his ears and shivered. The cry held a moment, and then broke abruptly, as though a hand had been clapped over the wailing mouth. The horse shivered and fidgeted. Skelton's face looked sharper and more white in the shadows. He chose the middle path and rode on.

The leafage was young as yet, and the forest clear of underwood. Skelton, glancing from right to left, looked along aisle after aisle of trees, all of them utterly alike, each ending where the black trunks converged and met in the distance. Sunlight glimmered through, tracing a network of shadows on the grass, and giving here and there a mysterious sense of movement. Twice Skelton reined in, ready to swear that he had seen figures flitting from tree to tree. But the vast hush held. He felt to find that his sword was loose in its scabbard, and swung his shield forward on the leather loop that slung it round his neck.

Then, like the breaking of clouds in a wet and windy sky, the forest thinned before him and fell away into a haze of golden light. A gleam of water came up out of the deeps of a narrow valley. Skelton found himself on the edge of the woodland, looking down over a stretch of yellow-flowered gorse.

Below him lay a mere, and in the midst of it an island. He could see the reflected shapes of the white clouds moving over the water, and the flakes of blue sky in between, while under the banks the water lay black as jet. The island itself might have been a May Day garland afloat upon the water.

It was a mass of fruit blossom, rose and white, piled upon the branches of a hundred trees.

Skelton shaded his eyes with his hand. The gable end of a house, dark and shaggy with thatch, discovered itself in the thick of the island orchard. Moreover, he saw a wooden landing-stage, with a barge moored there, where kingcups studded the banks with gold, and flags thrust their green swords up out of the water.

"H'm!" said he. "No smoke is rising. Has death been there? And that cry I heard?"

Skelton's horse threw up his head and shivered.

"Sancta Maria, Sancta Maria!"

Skelton was well-nigh as startled as his horse. The shrill, wild voice rose from the secret orchard yonder, carrying the two hundred paces between the island and the forest's edge. The words were so distinct that Skelton thought of witchery or magic.

"A new cry, and the voice of a girl! By the king's honour, am I afraid? And of what?"

The horse still shivered, and Skelton scanned this secret hollow hidden away in the thick of the forest. A dogged and adventurous look came into his eyes.

He spoke to the horse. "Gaillard, let us see what we can find yonder."

He rode down to the water's edge, noticing the double ropes that ran from a post on the bank to the barge on the further side. A wooden palisade came into view, and beyond it the roof shingles and louvre of a hall.

Skelton dismounted, looped Gaillard's bridle over his spear, and thrust the truncheon into the ground. The ferry ropes ran through a pulley-block, and, by drawing on one of them, Skelton found that he could bring the barge across. It came sliding towards the bank, ripples running from its blunt black prow, and, climbing in, he kept the wet rope moving, and so ferried over to the island.

Skelton stood listening, glancing right and left into the alleys of the orchard. The island and the house half hidden by fruit blossom was so silent that Skelton felt a certain eeriness stealing towards him like a shadow. Ahead of him rose the palisade, an open gate showing the paving-stones of a courtyard. He passed through, and swerved swiftly to one side from a huge hound that lay crouching within the gate, its muzzle between its paws. Skelton's sword came out against the dog's spring. But nothing

happened; the beast did not stir. Like the man under the cross by the three thorns, it was dead.

Skelton's eyes fell into a hard stare. He turned slowly on one heel, scanning the courtyard and the silent house like a man who is fearful of being taken unawares. Straight before him yawned a timber porch, the thatch coming down within three feet of the ground, the hollow within dark as the hollow of a cave. Skelton crossed the court, and had one foot inside the porch before he stiffened and recoiled against one of the massive corner-posts.

In a recessed seat sat the figure of an old man—an old man with a white beard and a clay-coloured face. The filmy eyes stared into nothingness. One lean hand held a crust of bread.

Skelton drew his breath sharply, and his face looked pinched.

"Mother of Heaven, is the whole world dead?"

A blank horror of the place seized him and sent him swinging back across the court with a clatter of steel. The Black Death had been here, and pestilence might be in his nostrils. His eyes fell on the dead hound by the gate. Did dogs die of the Black Death, or was there more than he imagined?

He turned with a set face and, frowning, walked back towards the house.

"Richard Skelton, my friend, you are very like a coward. You shall see the end of this before you cry *Nunc dimittis*."

The door leading from the porch into the hall stood ajar. Skelton could see nothing but the end of a wall hung with green arras, and the carved oak panels of a screen. Recklessness seized him—an impetuous desire to see all that this house contained. Sword on shoulder, he pushed across the threshold, turned, and stood staring up the hall.

In a great chair on the dais sat a girl clad in a gown of green sarcenet brodered with crimson thread. Her hands hung limply over the lion-headed arms of the chair; her eyes were two dark circles, her mouth open as though to utter a cry. Purple-black hair fell over her shoulders and about a face that was white as milk. Behind the chair rich arras made a cloud of red and gold.

For the moment Skelton thought that the girl, too, was dead, so white, stiff, and still was she. Then one hand raised itself and gripped the arm of the chair. She leant forward, with chin lifted, her eyes the eyes of one who dazedly accepts some prophetic doom.

"You have come! I have waited!"

She spoke in the French tongue, and like no Englishwoman, her voice a mere whisper.

Skelton stared.

"Assuredly, madame, I am here."

"The naked sword! Hasten! Waste no pity! Let it be done quickly!"

A dozen thoughts hastened together through Skelton's mind. "By my honour, she is but a child! Is it madness, or some terror greatly to be feared? What manner of man am I held to be? And this sword, too? Those eyes of hers stare one into stammering." He went forward three steps, and, dropping the point of his sword to the floor, looked at her compassionately with his shrewd grey eyes.

"Madame, if it was God's wisdom that brought me here, I come as a friend."

Her white face strained towards him.

"Sir, do not jest with me. You are my lord's messenger."

"I am no man's messenger."

"But you come to make an end!"

She tottered, put a hand to her throat, and then sank sideways over the arm of the chair. Her hair fell down over her face, leaving her white neck showing.

Skelton put his sword back into its scabbard, gave one glance over his shoulder, and made towards the dais.

"Good saints, a man feels a knife at his back in such a place! Some devil's work a-brewing. What's to be done? Maybe she is dead with fear."

He bent over her, touched the black hair and the white neck, and a sudden awe came over him. This helpless thing lying like a wounded bird! Skelton's eyes softened. He lifted her and carried her out into the courtyard, passing the dead man, who still stared into nothingness.

"T'is! That, and the silence of the place, would be enough to kill. Blue sky and the sunlight on apple blossoms are kinder."

He found a gate leading from the courtyard into the orchard, and laid the girl on the grass under a tree. Her head fell back, showing the white throat, and some of her hair clung to the joints of his arm-braces. The pale mouth, partly open, might have uttered a cry of pain.

Skelton ran back to the hall, found a silver-mounted maple cup on the dais table, and, filling it with water from a pitcher, returned to the orchard. He knelt and sprinkled some of the water on her throat and face.

She opened sudden eyes on him—great brown eyes full of a swimming fear.

"Sir, is it ended?"

She felt her bosom and then looked at her hands as though expecting to see blood. Pity, and something more than pity, seized Skelton and possessed him.

"Come, sister, why look at me with eyes of terror? Drink—here is water."

She had started up, and sat leaning against the trunk of the tree. Skelton held out the cup, but she put out a hand with the gesture of one warding a blow.

"No, not that—it is poisoned!"

"I took it but a moment ago from the pitcher in the hall."

"It is poisoned! Rather would I feel the sword in my heart!"

He looked at her with compassion.

"Madame, I tell you that you speak in riddles. Some great fear is upon you. Take courage. Is a Skelton of Skeltons a man likely to bring you death?"

His man's pride sounded a new note. Shading her eyes with her hand, she bent towards him and looked intently into his face.

"You do not look like one who has been sent to kill."

He laughed with a touch of grimness.

"We Skeltons are not cut-throats."

Yet, seeing that her eyes were still troubled and questioning, he drew his sword and, holding the crossed hilt before him, kissed it and made an oath.

"By the blessed blood, I, Richard Skelton, ride as a stranger through the forest, being bound for the sea, where I take ship for France. This I swear."

Her eyes filled with misty light.

"France!" She murmured the word. "St. Gilles and the Norman apple orchards!"

For some moments she dreamed, and then, waking, stretched out her hands with a sharp cry—

"Sir, is it the truth?"

"Have I not sworn it, I, Richard Skelton?"

She looked long into his eyes, and then let them fall under the downward shadow of their black lashes.

"I am called Nicolette," she said.

"Then, Nicolette, trust me. Speak, and let me serve."

She gave him one quick, upward glance of the brown eyes.

"Oh, I am hungry—I have tasted no food for three days!"

He was on his feet. "I have food and wine in my saddle-bag."

"Wait—let me tell everything. For three nights I have sat and watched. Messire Richard, have pity! I am the Lord of Mount Badon's lady. He brought me out of France, out of the great war. But then he tired, for he is quick and passionate, and very fierce. I was but a child. And it befell that a perilous secret that was his came to my ears. He would have killed me then, but I pleaded. And then came that other woman with the head of gold and the red, sneering mouth. I cannot tell you all, save that I knew that my lord desired my death. A month ago he sent me in a closed litter to this place. There were three good servants—that was his cunning—and they were true to me. First Bertrand went to the woods to hunt, and came not back again. Geoffrey crossed to seek him, and he, too, came not back again. Then—then three evenings ago a priest came. Old Stephen ferried him across. That night old Stephen and the dog died, and in the morning the priest had gone. But I—I was very fearful. I had a vision of things. I knew that death was watching—watching like a wolf in the dark. I could see the yellow eyes. I was alone. I touched neither food nor drink, and sometimes I cried aloud with fear. Nor had I courage in me to fly into the forest. Death is there. For three days I have had a voice near me; it speaks, and I listen. 'Death comes,' it says; 'if not with poison, then with the sword.' Do not laugh. It is true. I know that my lord desires my death."

She lay back panting, her hands over her bosom. Skelton was walking to and fro, clean, lithe, hawk-faced fighter that he was, trained from his youth to arms and to the governing of his manhood. This Norman girl, Nicolette, had spoken the truth. It had gushed out on his feet like water from a spring. Her white face and fear-weary eyes stirred a great wrath in him—wrath that was quickened by compassion.

"Nicolette," he said suddenly, coming to a stand before her, "this is a knot for a man's fingers to unravel."

Her eyes waited on his.

"I, Richard Skelton, bind myself to meddle in this matter. Maybe, it is in your heart to see the orchards of Normandy again?"

He saw before him the face of an eager, incredulous child.

"The orchards, and the white roads, and the green fields of St. Gilles! Messire, do not mock me!"

"Should I mock you in this?"

"Messire Richard——"

"Courage! I am here to serve."

He glanced at the western sky. The sun was hanging low above the tree-tops, and long shadows lay upon the orchard grass. In an hour twilight would fall, and the forest at night was no place for a man who knew not the ways.

"Nicolette," he said, "you shall rest here to-night, and I will stand on guard. But first you must eat. I left my horse over the water, and there is food for three days in the saddle-bag. I will go and bring him over."

He left her there, and forced upon himself a task that was done for pity and not for joy. Taking the body of the old man from the porch, he laid it in an outhouse, and, dragging the hound to the same place, he left it beside the body of the man. Skelton's face looked older. It was a grim business, gone through with set teeth and frowning eyes.

"Pah, the dead can witness! What does this child know of such things? The Sheriff must come here and hold his nostrils. France—surely! But first a word for honour and dishonour."

He brought his horse across, turned him into the empty stable, and went back to lash the barge to the landing-stage.

"If any cut-throat would come at us to-night, let him swim for it. As for the Lord of Mount Badon, I will haul him by the heels to the ordeal of the sword. Now for the child's hunger."

Before they supped together under the apple tree, Skelton put off his body armour and knelt for Nicolette to unfasten the laces of his helmet. He set red wine and white bread and venison before her on the grass, smiling at the shyness with which she sought to dissemble her hunger, and watching the colour steal back into her lips and the fear melt out of her eyes. His own close-cropped, sun-browned head stood out like the head on a medallion, with the green and shadowy spaces between the trees for a background.

The shy, gliding uplift of her eyes towards him made him forget that he had been on the road all day. Mostly she looked down into her own lap, the long black lashes making two curves of shadow. There was just a gleam of soft light now and again, like sunlight on coy water. The red mouth displayed provoking curves. The silences between them lured them to watch and wonder.

A blackbird burst into song on one of

the trees. A musing tenderness crept into Nicolette's eyes. She began to hum a Norman song, swinging one white hand to and fro, with the forefinger pointed. Skelton watched her, and the hush of the forest was the listening heart of a lover.

Her soul dropped back to earth when the blackbird ceased singing. She met Skelton's eyes, and went red to the lips.

"Ah, messire, I say my prayers when I sing. As for you, I shall always remember you in my prayers."

He held the cup towards her and then drank.

"My troth to you, Nicolette."

Dusk came, and with it a heavy dew. The fruit trees stood black against a saffron sky, and there were strange gleams of gold upon the darkening water of the mere. Skelton fastened on his body armour, while the girl stood holding his basinet. Her white face drooped towards him as he knelt for her to helm him.

"I crown you with my gratitude, Messire Richard."

Skelton felt the dusk like a sweet vapour about him, heavy with the scent of apple blossom.

He went to feed and water his horse, while Nicolette brought torches into the hall, lit them, and set them in the brackets. She saw that the dead man had gone from the porch, and blessed Skelton in her heart.

Night fell. Skelton sought to persuade her to go into the upper room and sleep.

"I can keep guard here," he said.

But she would not be persuaded.

"I could not sleep; and after all the horror of loneliness, it is good to look into the face of a friend."

"Then let us tarry here and talk. If you should fall asleep in your chair, Nicolette, I shall watch over you, and I shall wake you at dawn."

Her eyes questioned his.

"Tell me all that is in your thoughts."

He began to tell her of his journey to France, why he went thither, and whence he came. Very gently he brought the morrow before her, with its needs, perils, and importunities. Her face showed a vague unrest, but her eyes met his without fear.

"Messire Richard, I trust you, for who else is there for me to trust? I will do all that you desire, though, to tell the tale before strangers, to have it tossed abroad——"

"Nicolette, let not that shame you. The shame shall lie elsewhere. Tell me the

truth. This false lord of yours—your heart will not weaken out of pity?"

He saw her face stiffen.

"He is horrible to me. Ah, if you knew!"

bloom from the orchard trees; the torches burnt steadily in the brackets. The vast hush of the forest shut the place in as with a great black cliff.

Suddenly Nicolette started in her chair.



...It is he!"

She did not catch the gleam in Skelton's eyes.

"Then let God judge him," he said.

The night was wonderfully still. No wind stirred to rattle the lattices or blow the

She sat rigid, listening, her eyes on Skelton's face.

He saw her lips move.

"Listen!"

A faint sound came out of the night, a

splashing sound, as though someone were swimming the mere. Skelton had laid his sword and shield on the table. He drew them towards him.

Nicolette's hand pointed.

"The door!"

It stood half open, with the oak bar leaning against the wall.

"Quick—let us bar the door!"

"Let the door bide as it is. Take courage, Nicolette! Listen!"

The splashing had ceased, and out of the stillness of the night came the sound of rapid and heavy breathing. The pupils of Nicolette's eyes dilated, and her lips moved as though she were praying. Skelton put himself between her and the door.

Soft, padding footsteps crossed the courtyard. The two in the hall waited, wondering what the torchlight would reveal. Skelton's eyes were set steadily towards the door. He drew his breath through twitching nostrils.

"Ah!"

Then they saw the thing that had padded across the courtyard—a huge, tawny-coloured mastiff with a spiked collar about his throat. Water was dripping from the beast's body, and his eyes shone blood-red in the torchlight.

The dog turned, blinked, and then shot forward like a stone from a mangonel. It uttered no sound, but leapt at Skelton and took the sword's point in its throat.

Skelton slew the dog as it struggled to rise. Nicolette had covered her face with her hands. She remained cowering till she heard the sound of Skelton's voice.

"Heaven be thanked that I missed the right road to-day!" he said. "There are those who sent the dog to be reckoned with across the water."

He glanced at the torches, kindled two fresh ones and thrust them into the brackets before he went to the door and peered through the gap by the hinges. A full moon had just topped the forest, and its light lit the whole courtyard, save where the palisade threw a deep black shadow.

Skelton held his breath and listened. A faint, creaking sound came to his ears, and the swish of a rope striking the water.

"Thunder! Someone has swum across and unfastened the barge!"

A black figure darted into the moonlit courtyard, stood motionless a moment, and then began to steal towards the porch. Skelton saw that it came alone. He drew back behind the half-closed door, standing close to the wall.

Footsteps shuffled at the porch. He could hear the man breathing close to the door-hinges. An eye would be peeping there—Skelton guessed that much—but he knew that whoever spied there could not see the figure in armour set like a pillar against the wall. Skelton's sword-arm stiffened. He never moved his eyes from the edge of the door.

The door moved very slightly, then something red appeared at the edge thereof—the fringe of a man's hair. A face followed it, a long, lean, crooked-nosed face straining forward at the end of a leathery neck. Then eyes looked towards Nicolette, seated in the chair on the dais. They were narrow eyes, set close together under oblique eyebrows.

Then Skelton struck. He had a moment's glimpse of the narrow eyes darting round at him and dilating with fear. The sword fell before the man could dodge. He sprawled face downwards, shooting out his hands at the ends of the green sleeves of a close-fitting jupon.

Skelton wasted no pity, and, dragging the body inside the hall, left it behind the door. Then he put an eye to the hinge-crack and waited. He could hear the plash of ripples against the landing-stage, and the noise of the ferry rope running through the pulley-block. The prow of the barge ground against the stage.

Skelton stood ready to close and bar the door should the odds promise to be too heavy. He watched the gateway in the palisade. A solitary figure came into view, and, by the way the moonlight glinted upon it, Skelton knew that the man came armed. A silver streak betrayed the naked sword that he carried upon his shoulder.

The figure remained poised for an instant between the black barriers of the palisade. Presently it moved forward into the courtyard, turning its head this way and that, and showing a snout-visored basinet that gave it the look of some grotesque beast. No other figure followed it, and Skelton's grim mouth twitched out a smile.

He turned, strode up the hall, and took his shield from the table. Nicolette's dark eyes gazed at him in mute appeal.

"Bide there," he said to her in a low voice, "and leave us room to quarrel."

He dropped the point of his sword to the floor and rested his hands on the pommel.

They heard footsteps enter the porch. The door was thrust open, and a knight in polished harness, with a red surcoat turned up over his sword-belt, stood in the dark

entry. Behind the black holes in the snout-like visor were eyes, but they were invisible to Richard Skelton and Nicolette. For fully half a minute the figure remained motionless in the torchlight, as though the man within the steel shell were astonished at what he saw. The red-haired servant in the green jupon lay dead behind the door, the mastiff under the table. Nicolette, with chin tilted, stared wide-eyed down the hall. Skelton, grim and inscrutable, stood beside her, leaning on his sword.

The man in the red surcoat moved at last. He advanced up the hall and, raising his sword, pointed towards the door.

Skelton threw up his head and laughed.

"God's mercy, sir, if I stand in your way, the saints be thanked for it!"

"Out, out!"

"The dog and the servant go before their lord."

A sob of wrath came from the closed helmet. He of the red surcoat rushed suddenly upon Skelton, heaving up his sword. Skelton sprang forward so as to smother the blow. The two steel-clad bodies met with a crash.

Skelton's sinews proved the stiffer, and the man in red went back. He brought up with a jerk against the heavy table, and saved himself, only to find Skelton's sword rattling about his head. The blade glided off the basinet to the left shoulder, cut the linked mail between the shoulder-plates, and drew blood.

The red knight was a big man and no lap-dog. He dropped his shield, and, putting both hands to his sword, he fell upon Skelton like a labourer flailing corn. The blows came with a savage clatter, but they were rash, tempestuous blows that a cool fighter could put aside. Skelton gave back, guarding himself and watching his man.

Then the red knight showed his colour. He swerved aside and made a rush towards the dais, where Nicolette sat very white and still. The great sword flew up. Her brown eyes watched it as though bewitched.

Skelton shouted, as he leapt after the man in red—

"Down, down! Throw yourself down!"

His cry broke the spell. She threw herself forward under the very blade of the sweeping sword. The sword struck the back of the oak chair and jammed in the tough wood.

The red knight wrenched it free, but Skelton was on him with eyes of fire. His wrath whistled with the sweep of his sword.

A blow on the gorget wrenched the plates apart. A second blow went home even more grimly. The red knight blundered back and struck the wall close to one of the torch brackets.

He recovered himself, snatched the torch, and rushed blindly at Skelton, trying to thrust the flames into Skelton's face. Skelton struck the arm down and, making a point of his sword, aimed for the broken gorget. The point went home. For a moment the red knight hung like a doll on a wire, and then fell backwards with an upjerking of the arms.

Skelton trod out the torch and stood over him, but the red knight did not move. A red stream poured out over the broken plates of the gorget.

Nicolette had risen, her black hair clouding about her eyes. Skelton glanced at her, and, bending over the fallen man, cut the helmet laces with his dagger. The steel shell fell away, showing the turgid, fleshy face of a man of strong passions and coarse desires.

Skelton heard Nicolette utter a strange cry. She was at his elbow, staring at the dead man.

"It is he!"

She gripped Skelton's sword-arm with her two hands and looked at the face of the man—her husband—who had plotted to bring her death.

The sun was still tangled among the tree-tops when Richard Skelton and Nicolette took leave of the secret orchard. The light of the dawn streamed over the forest, slashing the dark water of the mere with swords of gold. A thin white mist still shimmered about the island, and the fruit trees looked dim and grey.

Utter weariness had given Nicolette sleep, but a horror of the place lived in her eyes as she looked back across the water. Death and dishonour remained there, and she dreaded the hard, cold eyes of the world.

Skelton had crossed before it was light to discover whether the Lord of Mount Badon had left men hidden in the woods. He had found two horses tethered to a tree, and had unfastened the beasts and turned them loose into the forest. Now he was cutting the ferry rope and sending the barge adrift on the water.

He came, and saw Nicolette's frightened eyes.

"Look not back at life," he said. "Come, little sister, courage!"

She held out her hands to him.

"Ah, Messire Richard, if there were no men to ask questions, to gape at me and say: 'Why this? Why that?' My heart is weak in me. I cannot bear it!"

Skelton took her hands.

"Nicolette," he said, "would you be at the mercy of that yellow-headed woman's tongue? No, by my honour, you must suffer this, for my sake, child, as well as for your own. The truth must be told."

She looked at him and burst into tears.

"Do with me as you desire. I have none to trust but you."

Gaillard carried them both that morning, and the good saints were kind to them in the forest. At the three thorns, where the dead man still sat at the foot of the cross, they fell in with a forester who knew all the ways.

"Good friend, is Sir Thomas of Broomhanger still Sheriff?"

"He is, lording, and may Mother Mary give him a long life."

"Show me the road to Broomhanger."

"Follow your left hand, lording, and two leagues will take you there."

Sir Thomas and Richard Skelton had fought together in the French wars, and the Sheriff was a shrewd man and straight as a sword.

"Tarry here three days," he said, "and we will have the truth stored in the noddles of our inquest men. They will be brisk for love of me. Geoffrey of Mount Badon? Pah, a bullying, profligate devil! And that black-eyed child, too! Had the man no pity?"

They looked at Nicolette, eating sweetmeats in the window-seat, with Dame Isabelle to comfort her.

"Spare the child where you can, old comrade."

"Trust me, Dick. In a week you shall be in France."

Thomas of Broomhanger was as good as his word.

The fruit blossom had fallen in the orchards of St. Gilles when Nicolette walked once more in her father's garden, and saw the white pigeons crowding the red roof of the great dove-cot. Aspens shivered against a sky of blue, and the broad meadows about the chateau were covered with cloth of gold.

A month had passed, and Nicolette had the look of one who waited. She sat often at a turret window, gazing along the white road that ran between the aspen trees.

"He will come again," she said to herself—"yes, he will come."

A wet sunset in June brought Richard Skelton to St. Gilles. Faces peeped out of the chateau windows at him; good folk had conspired.

"If Messire Skelton would walk in the garden, the Sire de St. Gilles may be found there."

Skelton went, and found Nicolette walking amid the rose bushes and the beds of lavender and thyme. The sky had broken in the west, and the wet world smoked like a sweet sacrifice.

Her startled face caught the sunset glow.

"Messire Richard!"

"Nicolette, I have ridden seven leagues to-day."

"Through the rain?"

"Ah, and I am discontented—angry with this fair place. No man may carry you away from St. Gilles."

She looked at him with shy brown eyes that glimmered.

"Some men are so strong," she said.

"So strong?"

"That it is useless for a woman to say them nay."

He caught her and held her fast.

"My desire, I am stronger than death!"

She put up her mouth to be kissed.



Vol I

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St. Stephen's Eve

BY WARWICK DEEPING

THE sky was a bowl of dusky azure, when Alain the page skipped over the stertorous carcass of Croquant the porter, unlatched the postern in the great gate, and crept across the trestle bridge that spanned the moat. For two nights and a day snow had fallen, spreading a cloak of glittering samite over moor and meadow, ribbing the woods with silver, deepening a winter silence over the world. Now, at St. Stephen's eve, the gray pinions of the snow-clouds had fled. A full moon had reared her silver buckler in the sky, pouring mysterious glory upon the ivory hills. The broad moat, dappled with moonbeams, stretched dim yet brilliant under the lad's feet. Above, the towers of Terabil, with their machicolated shadows, cut the dusky splendor of the sky.

It was St. Stephen's eve, and witchery breathed in the frosty silence of the hour. Alain, dimpling the snow, tucked his fustian cloak over his girdle and turned southwards, with his pert nose sniffing the air, his black eyes glistening in the moonlight. Not far distant the gaunt giants of the forest lifted up their grotesque branches to the sky. A wild arabesque, solemn and mysterious, the woods scrolled the white plain of the snow and the steel-visaged night.

It was St. Stephen's eve, the one eve in the year when Fulk of the Forest, mythical woodsman, was said to cleave the trunk of the Old Oak and come forth to hunt with ten couples of red-eyed hounds. So ran the legend on the lips of the country beldames—a legend that had ruled the ingle-nooks for centuries. On St. Stephen's eve Fulk's horn made the dim woods shudder; the baying of his ghostly pack echoed through the black bowels of the forest. And Alain, sturdy lad, with his poll packed with old wives' tales, had crept out that night from Terabil to see Black Fulk come forth.

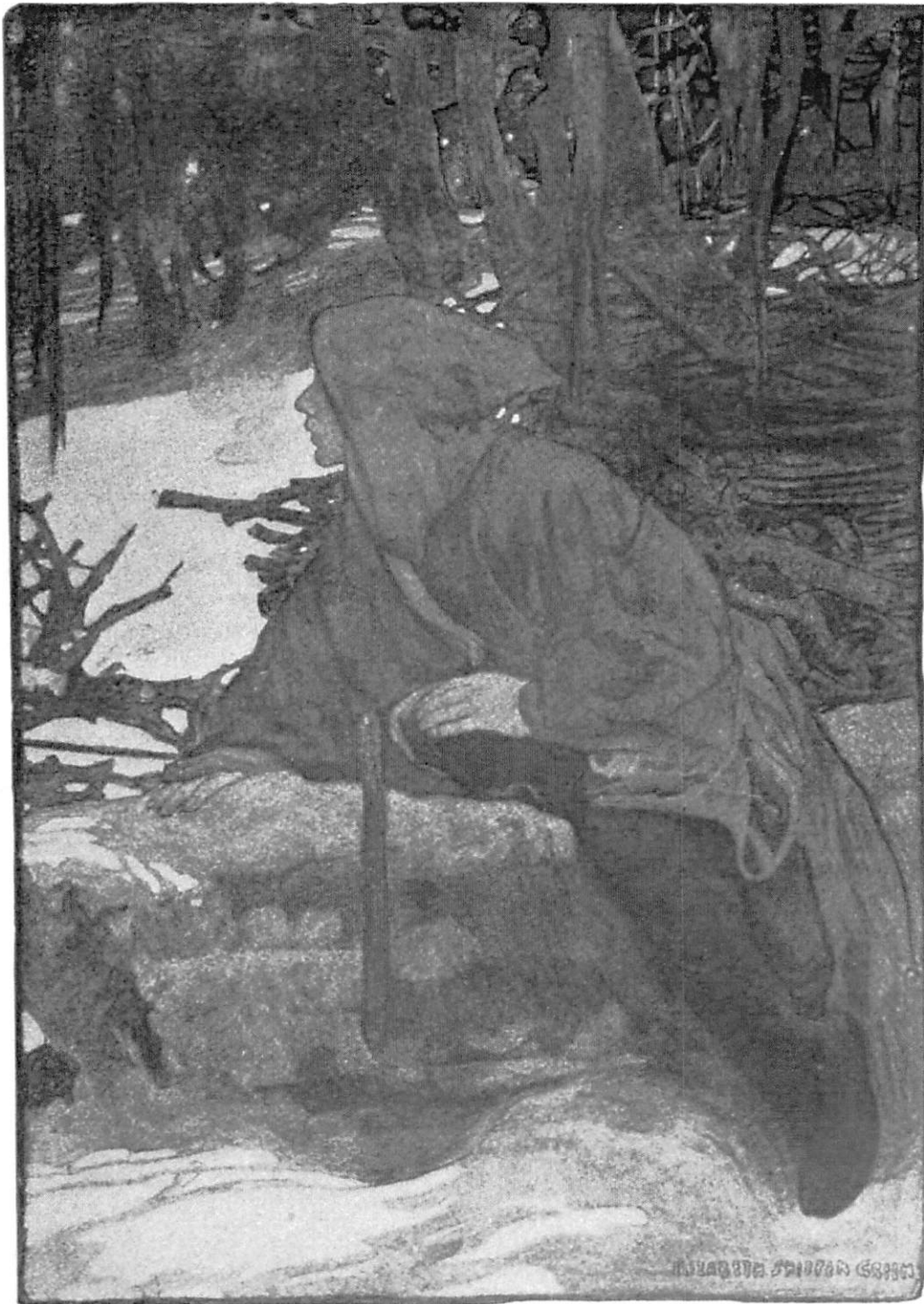
He held on across the waste of snow,

glancing up now and again from the dark barriers of the woods to the moon swimming calmly overhead. He was hugging his boyish errantry under his cloak with a species of ecstatic fear, shivering one moment till his teeth chattered, warm the next with his scamper over the snow. It was not long before he touched the trees, gaunt and solitary sentinels appealing the moon with their multitudinous hands. Their trunks crowded the distance, making strange gloom over the brilliant carpet of winter.

Alain plunged in, knowing the place well, and able to abide by the path despite the snow. Anon, as the black trunks thickened and the feltwork of boughs grew denser overhead, he came towards a broad clearing, white in the light of the moon. In the centre of the place stood a gigantic oak, gnarled, grim, and terrible, a patriarch rent by the sword of centuries, primeval and hoary in its sullen solitude. The stars seemed to hang above its branches like a magic crown.

Alain, big-eyed, alert as a weasel, huddled down behind a pile of fagots on the outskirts of the clearing. An oak log served him as a seat. He turned the hood of his cloak over his head, and sat and stared at the tree. A hundred fantastic fancies danced and flickered in his brain. His ears tingled with the frosty air; his breath rose above him like vapor.

The forest stood soundless and calm under the moon. The silence was supernatural in its utter emptiness. Not a wind stirred; not a cloud moved athwart the sky; the very earth seemed dead, a frozen planet, sunless and without life. The lad crouching by the fagots huddled his cloak about him, and still stared at the tree. The night air was freezing his courage; the sinister significance of the place began to bulk more vividly in his imagination. His eyes darted swift, restless glances into the surrounding



ALAIN CREPT OUT TO SEE BLACK FULK COME FORTH

gloom. Fear seemed to create sounds from the void of silence. He remembered with a twinge of hunger the red warmth of the guard-room fire, the fumes of roast meat and ale, even drunken Croquant, sleeping behind the half-shut door. Black Fulk of the Forest with his lurid hounds, viewed erstwhile with a mischievous glee, began to bulk with a more terrific realism that was not comforting. Alain stared at the great tree with the fascination of a gradual fear. He could hear his heart cantering, his breath whistling between his teeth. Each moment he expected to behold the black trunk open with a glare of flame and a sound as of thunder, to see the eyes of the hell-hounds burning like live coals over the snow.

Magic or no magic, some sound came to him from the forest, setting his ears tingling, his mouth agape. It was a queer metallic sound, thin and eerie in the vast void of the night. He crouched low behind the fagots like a frightened rabbit, listening, and staring into the gloomy vistas of the woods. A noise as of muffled hoofs waxed gradual in the distance—a sinister under-chant like the galloping of a pack of wolves, save that there was no tonguing, no howling under the moon. Now and again there came a clear, half-musical note as of steel smiting steel.

The boy's heels were itching for flight, and he grew cold with a most brisk and holy terror. None the less there was some comfort in the fagot screen, and he clung to it with a flicker of latent courage. As he crouched, gazing into the wood, the darkness ahead of him under the trees seemed to grow alive with fitful light, transient flashes as of armor moving under the moon. Shadows, huge and ominous, drew out of the black tunnels of the trees. Alain, stiff with wonder, saw armed men pour from the forest and gather round Fulk's Oak.

They gathered round in a great circle, their horses trampling the snow, their harness shining brilliant in the moonlight. A steaming vapor ascended from them into the frosty air. They were spectral enough, in all truth, and yet too real to cheat the boy's fancy. Their utter silence astonished him. Whence came they, and for what end? Fifty

spears gathered round the Fairy Oak on St. Stephen's eve at midnight. A strange company, wizard and ghostly, wandering through the woods over the silent snow.

He heard a gruff voice break the quiet. A knight on a black horse, standing under the great oak, was speaking. He seemed to be giving orders in an undertone. Alain, with his eyes fixed on the figure, saw a pennon stream out black against the sky. It was trebly dentate at the "fly," and pierced in the centre by a hollow star. The lad by the fagots caught a sudden quick breath, doubled his knees under him, like a bird crouching for flight.

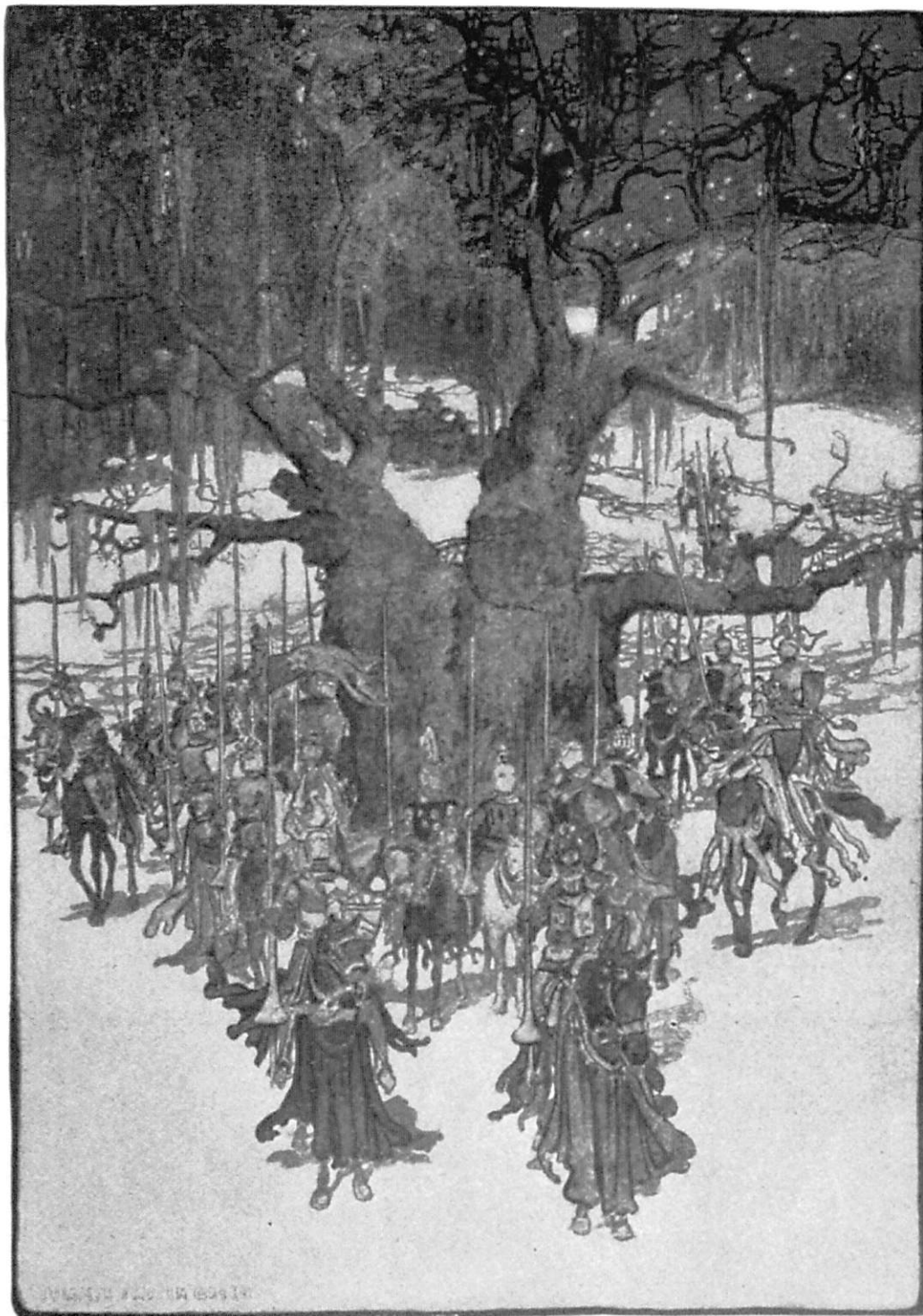
The pennon of Guiscard of Avray!

The whole scene grew eloquent in the twinkling of a snowflake. The riders of the Red Valley massed about the Fairy Oak one mile from Terabil! The knowledge of a century's bloody feuds streamed athwart the lad's mind. A silent march over the snow, a night attack, Sire Bertrand absent at court, his young wife housed in Terabil, behind the useless swords of a drunken garrison. The postern in the great gate open. Alain saw all this in a flash of fear. He had crept forth to catch Fulk of the Forest at his midnight hunt; he had seen the raiders of Avray gather about the great oak for the surprise and sacking of Terabil in the Mere.

Superstition evaporated on the instant. The lad was all warm flesh and eager sinew; his heart quickened, but grew steady; he tucked his cloak up under his girdle, slipped from his hiding-place, and ran.

Never a glance back did he give as he skimmed silently over the snow. The branches of the trees flew back above his head; the keen air whistled in his ears. Even as he ran he could catch the muffled tramp of horses at the trot. The sound stirred him like a trumpet-cry. Panting, wide-mouthed, he reached the open, and scurried on over the snow.

Terabil, with its silver girdle of water, lay before him in the moonlight; he could see the towers black and saturnine under the sky. The white plain seemed to heave endless under his feet. Once he stumbled over a knot of heather, fell, picked himself up, and ran the harder. He was half-way to the water, when he



A STRANGE COMPANY, WIZARD AND GHOSTLY, WANDERING OVER THE SNOW



THE LADY MAUDE IN CASTLE TERABIL

heard a shout rise from the woods—a keen, angry cry, like the tonguing of a hound that has seen the quarry.

Alain reached the bridge, turned for a moment and stared back towards the forest. A dark mass was moving over the snow, grim and serrate, silvered with steel. They of Avray made little sound as they came galloping over the winter-cushioned grass. He footed it fast across the bridge, bent down at the last span and tugged at the boards. The bolts were home, and he could not stir the limbers. He fumbled at the fastenings, found them frozen to his stiff fingers. With a little gulp of despair, he sprang in through the open yawn of the gate, swung it to with a crash, hitched up the chain, and rammed home the bolts.

By the door he stumbled over the carcass of Croquart the porter. He bent down and pulled his beard, screamed into his ear. The man was drunk, torpid as a stone; he only muttered in his sleep inarticulate oaths, and turned his hairy muzzle to the wall.

Alain sprang into the guard-room, shouting as he ran. The fire had burned low under the great chimney, and a single cresset smoked and spluttered on the wall. Two men were dozing on a settle before the red embers of the fire. A score more were sprawling about the table or snoring on the rushes, drunk on this wassail night, helpless as hogs-heads. Alain cursed them in a whimpering treble, and shook the men sleeping on the settle by the shoulders. They started up, fiery-faced and voluble. One of them was Hanotin the sergeant—a man with a beard like a black bear's hide, burly as Og of Bashan, strong as an oak. Alain squealed in his face, out of breath, beside himself:

"Arm! arm! Guiscard is at the gate!"

Hanotin stared like a sleepy ogre.

"Quick, you scullions! Fifty spears from Avray are pricking over the snow. I caught them in the forest by Fulk's Oak. They are crossing the bridge. Quick, I say!"

Black Hanotin swore, kicked sundry of his comrades, swore again. There were but two fit men and a boy to hold Terabil. The giant blundered to the arm-rack, slipped on steel cap and hauberk, took an axe from the wall, and went out with

his comrade to the gate. Alain saw them squinting through the grill as he made for the court and the state quarters.

Even as Alain crossed the court he heard the thunder of steel upon the gate. The sound echoed through the castle in the hush of the night, mingled with the hoarse clamor of many voices. The lad plunged up a stairway and came into a long gallery, lighted by mullioned windows towards the court. Moonlight streamed in, calling dim colors into the scutcheons on the glass. He passed along the gallery, and beat with his fist upon a door at the end thereof.

Anon the latch slipped, the door opened a very little, giving view of a woman, whose white face peered from a fleece of dishevelled hair. She had a cloak cast over her shoulders as though she had but that moment risen from her bed.

"Dame Jake!" cried the boy.

The thunder against the gate echoed through the night-darkened place. The woman heard it, came out into the gallery, shivering, and staring into Alain's eyes.

"What is it,—tell me?"

"Guiscard and his men are breaking in. The guards are drunk, save Hanotin and the Gascon. They of Avray will take the castle. The Lady Maude, what of her?"

The woman tossed her hair from her shoulders with a gesture of despair. Her mouth showed a circle of jet in the half-gloom; her eyes dilated. She stood holding her throat, listening like one dazed to the din beneath. Alain, rigid and white of face, was staring at the distorted visage of the moon, his jaw thrust forward, his fingers twisting the buttons of his tunic.

"I have it," he said.

"What?"

"Take me in quickly—"

"Where?"

"We must hide Sire Bertrand's wife. See, my hair is long; I will put on woman's gear and play the lady. Quick; it is the last hope."

The woman gripped his shoulder, kissed him suddenly on the lips. They passed in together, bolting the door after them. Groping in the dark through an anteroom, overturning an embroidery-frame, they came into an inner chamber,

where a single taper burned—the bed-chamber of Sire Bertrand's young wife.

There was a great bed in one corner, carven richly, and garnished with gold and painted escutcheons. Its pillars were gilt-work, its tester purple silk. On the bed was seated a young girl, with jet-black hair falling about her face, streaking her white night-gear even to her knees. Her eyes were dark, wonderful to look upon, yet full of fear. She had thrust her little feet into a pair of embroidered slippers. Her face was pale as apple-blossom, and she shivered like an aspen as she sat.

Alain knelt to her and touched her hand. Her tirewoman took a cloak of blue and spread it over her lady's shoulders. Together, in hurried words, they told her of her peril and their plan for baffling it that night. The girl heard them with a torpid stare of fear. Even as they spoke to her a din of steel shivered through the silence. Guiscard and his men had broken in, and had come hand to hand with Hanotin and the Gascon at the gate.

In the bedchamber there was a great cupboard, full of samites, robes of silk, fine linen, and rich girdles. A stout latch closed the door. Dame Jake, taking her lady by the shoulders, thrust her in straightway, smothered her behind the clothes, and latched the door. Turning, she flung night-gear and a cloak at Alain's feet, and going out, stood listening in the outer chamber.

The clash of steel had ceased at the gate. In its stead came the tramp of mailed feet in the court, a babel of hoarse voices resounding from wall to wall. A cresset waved across the gloom, casting a weird light on armor and on casement. Sinister sounds arose from the guard-room—a grim, whimpering cry, for the Avray men were putting the drunkards to the sword.

Soon stairway and gallery resounded to the clangor of Guiscard's soldiery. Blows were dealt against the door. One burly ruffian, setting his shoulders to the panelling, burst the bolts like willow withes; the whole rout streamed in.

On the bed sat Alain, with his black

curls upon his shoulders, his boy's figure wrapped in a green mantle, closely bound by a girdle of silver. Dame Jake, with her head hid in the mock lady's bosom, knelt on the floor, clasping Alain's knees. The single taper cast a thin radiance over the scene, showing the mailed men crowding the threshold, the crouching woman, the stiff, white-faced figure on the bed.

Guiscard, black of beard and black of eye, came into the room with sword sheathed, a foppish smirk upon his face.

"Madame, your pardon for a Christmas greeting. The night is fair, though frosty. I must bid you make ready to ride with us to Avray."

"Ah!"

"Sire Bertrand will be our debtor."

"For vengeance, the saints see to it."

They took the woman Jake, two of them together, dragged her aside, and cast her headlong into a corner. Alain, whimpering and covering his eyes with his sleeve, was seized by Guiscard and carried bodily from the room. He made brave outcry enough, while Dame Jake's screams followed him down the gallery.

Guiscard of Avray bore his burden into the court, smiling into his black beard, and licking his long, red lips. By the gate, Alain had a grim vision of black Hanotin, lying dead against the wall, with his skull cleft, his axe splintered in his hand. Over the Mere they passed, the moonlight pointing their shadows in the water. Guiscard's men trailed after him, hot and lusty, their breath steaming to the heavens, their armor twinkling in the gloom.

So they took horse again and cantered away over the snow, singing a rough was-sail song to match the clangor of their arms. The woods received them, and the mild moon stared down on the snow, scarred and trampled under the boughs.

By dawn that morning, Dame Jake and her lady had taken horse and fled for Domvrault over the moors. By evening, when the torches were red in the west, they were safely housed within honest walls. But Alain lay dead in the castle ditch at Avray, with a poniard wound over his heart.

Probed

SWORD BEFORE TONGUE.

By WARWICK DEEPING,

Author of "Uther and Igraine," "The Seven Streams," "Rust of Rome," etc.

ROSAMUND BASSET, that swarthy girl with the red mouth and the white teeth, stood in the doorway of her tent under the oak trees of the forest, and listened to the whispering of her two women,

who were turning tunics, girdles, and shoes out of a black oak hutch.

The two women glanced often at the girl in her hunting dress of Lincoln green. They knew why she stood there in silence and in anger, for Rosamund Basset was a ward of the king, and in those days a ward of the king was often bought and sold.

"The king has commanded her to marry Roger de Quintet's nephew," said Blondelle, whose hair was the colour of saffron—"a great oaf of a boy. They say that Roger de Quintet has been jingling gold pieces under the king's nose ever since we came into the forest."

"Bah!" said the other, who had the mouth of a rabbit and jealous eyes. "I should even be ready to pity the boy. Show me a worse temper—"

"Well, well, we are not all honey-pots. And when one is the lady of many manors—"

"All the men will swear that there never was such beauty!"

Red-haired Joan looked round with a snicker, as though she were ready to exult a little over this troubling of her mistress's pride.

"It will be a bad day for the boy," said she, "unless he can ride the mare they are bringing him. It is time for robing. The trumpets will blow for supper in half an hour."

"Call her in, then."

"Not I! I am not in a mood for her temper. Messire de Quintet's nephew must see to that."

From the doorway of the tent stretched a

long green glade carpeted with turf that was sleek and smooth as velvet. On every side it was shut in by the huge trunks and sweeping foliage of old forest trees. Here and there the evening sunlight streamed through and dappled the grass with gold. The sunlight fell also upon the diverse colours of many tents that had been pitched in the glade, the blues, purples, and reds looming up richly under the green gloom of the trees. Further away Rosamund saw fires burning where the king's cook and his men were roasting meat for the king's supper. From amid the trees came the whimpering of hounds and the sound of horses munching grass.

Rosamund Basset had a mirror in one hand and a silver comb in the other. But her hands were idle as she stood there and watched two figures come out of a white tent that had been pitched close to the king's pavilion. One was the figure of a lean old man who walked with a slight limp, and whose chin and nose were like the horns of a new moon. The other was that of a young man, who towered up over his companion like an ash tree overtopping a stunted thorn. They began to move up the glade in the direction of Rosamund's tent, the old man with the face like a new moon talking volubly and making many gestures with his hands.

The younger man did not appear very desirous of approaching Rosamund Basset's tent. He looked sulky and restless, avoiding his companion's eyes, and staring obstinately into the depths of the forest. And Rosamund, watching him from the doorway of her tent, felt a quick contempt for this young bachelor whom Roger de Quintet was driving like a calf to market.

The king's "friend" turned away with a threatening uplift of his sharp chin. He had brought this young man, his nephew, well on the road towards marrying a wealthy wife. The youngster must be left to manage some part of the wooing. So Roger de Quintet turned back, leaving his nephew alone.

Rosamund had lifted her mirror. She looked at her own reflection, drawing back

the red lips over the white teeth, and creasing her forehead into a frown. Then she threw the comb and the mirror to her two women, and walked out boldly to deal with Roger de Quintet's nephew.

The young man appeared surprised to find her approaching him so readily. He was a sinewy fellow, brown as a cob-nut, with great hands that looked very clumsy but very strong. His plain, rust-coloured surcoat had a silver hawk embroidered on the breast. But Rosamund Basset seemed to have more of the hawk about her than had this tall brown lad, who looked as though he were trying to keep the sunlight out of his eyes.

It was the girl who opened the attack, and the manner of it was not encouraging.

"This is Roger de Quintet's nephew, is it not?" she said.

The young man stared at her with very solemn blue eyes. It was evident that he was a little afraid of women, and Rosamund Basset had no wish to reassure him.

"Certainly. Roger de Quintet is my uncle," he answered her.

"Ah, to be sure, and a very shrewd gentleman is Roger de Quintet. And you?"

"I am Jasper Botterel. Messire Roger de Quintet has the wardship of me and my manors. In six months——"

"What a big baby you are," she said, breaking in on him with a hard little laugh, "to be rocked in your good uncle's cradle! We know what we know, eh, Messire Jasper Botterel? Come, I have a few words to say to you."

She turned and walked away among the oak trees, the young man following her, and looking as though he wished himself anywhere but at her heels. He could not help noticing how tall and straight she was, how black her hair seemed, and how her green tunic was belted about her with a curious girdle crusted with purple stones. Rosamund Basset's mouth was the mouth of a shrew, and it would not have comforted Jasper Botterel had he seen it. She walked on for a hundred paces before she faced round sharply and looked him in the eyes.

"Come, now, Messire Jasper Botterel," she said, her swarthy face hard and insolent, "tell me how much money you have given the king in order that you may marry me?"

The young man stared at her with his solemn blue eyes, and looked as though he did not know what to do with his big hands.

"I have given the king no money," he said; "but as for Roger de Quintet, my uncle——"

"Ah, your sweet uncle! Well, my good fool, it is your uncle, no doubt, who has given the king money, and here am I, to be sold like a filly at a fair. Perdition take you and your uncle, Messire Jasper Botterel! That is what I have to say."

The young man's brown face went red under its tan. He looked at her stolidly, as though wondering what he should say.

"My uncle may very well go to perdition," he answered. "All the same, he has me and my manors under his thumb. As for marrying you——"

She tossed her head and laughed impatiently.

"And am I to marry such a booby—a lank puppy led on a string? By my soul, I would rather die first! I have some pride, and a will of my own, so may the devil fly away with your uncle!"

The young man reddened still further.

"I assure you," he retorted, with blunt sincerity, "that I am in no hurry to marry you."

"Then the more fool you!" she said. "Merciful Heaven, why do you stand there staring like a sheep?"

She began to walk to and fro under the trees, carrying her head high and biting her lip. Jasper Botterel watched her with the air of a man who heartily wished himself saved from the answering of such a riddle.

"Well, what are you going to do, Messire——what are you going to do?" she asked, turning on him with passionate impatience.

"Assuredly," said he, "the king has commanded me to marry you. And though it would be treason to curse the king——"

"Thank you, Messire——thank you, from my heart! It is all so simple, eh? Here we are, like a couple of dolls on wires. The king plays with one, your good uncle with the other. And we must dance, whether we like it or no, because the king takes money, and your good uncle gives it. The devil fly away with both of you! I wish you had never been born!"

"Can I say less?" said he, beginning to be a little angry.

Her eyes flashed back at him.

"By my soul, I will never marry a man who is afraid of his own uncle!"

"I should never have asked you to, madame," he retorted; "I am wise enough for that!"

"Good——very good!" said she. "What comfort does one get from talking to a jackdaw?"

And she turned and walked back in a fury

towards her tent, leaving the young man wondering what good they had done by quarrelling.

Jasper Botterel stood to serve at the king's table that night; but though Jasper had been trained as a page in his uncle's house, he was more fitted for the war-saddle than for serving at the dais table of a king. The great white pavilion was full of a gay company, and Jasper was shy of these debonair folk in their splendid clothes. He felt too big among the tables, and when any lady laughed, Jasper had a suspicion that the laugh was against himself. Moreover, Rosamund Basset sat on the bench next to the queen, and when her eyes met Jasper's, it seemed to him that she thought him the sorriest thing in the world.

It is easy for a man to blunder when he feels like a clumsy oaf, and Jasper drew the eyes of the whole company upon him by stumbling over one of the king's dogs, and emptying a dish of venison over his uncle's back.

"Your boy is a shy lad," said the king to Messire Roger.

"Truly, sire, his hands and feet are big." And Messire Roger de Quintet dug the point of his girdle knife into the flesh of his nephew's leg.

"Dolt," said his uncle, "shall I ever teach you manners?"

Jasper's face blazed, but he stooped to pick up the dish that had followed the venison.

"Some day we shall see," he said, with dogs scrambling round his legs for the fallen meat. "One thing I know—may I have my tongue pulled out if they ever marry me to that black-haired shrew yonder!"

And Rosamund Basset was no less sure that she would never marry an overgrown boy who could not even carry a dish to table.

The forest was very still that night, but not more still than Rosamund Basset lying in her truckle bed under the red canvas of her tent. A full moon was up, glimmering through the trees, and the two women, Joan and Blondelle, had long ago fallen asleep. Rosamund listened a while to the steady rhythm of their breathing before she put one white foot out of bed, slipped the coverlet aside, and began to dress.

"May I die a nun before they marry me to that fool!" she thought. "I know what the king's greed is; he will not lose a good bargain, even in the breaking of a woman's heart. Roger de Quintet, good sir, would you were hanged in one of these trees!"

She dressed herself stealthily, putting on her tunic of Lincoln green, and binding it with the girdle set with purple stones. A cloak and a hood of green covered her black hair, which she left loose upon her shoulders. Then she laced up her brown leather shoes, brodered over with scarlet cord, and, lifting the flap of the tent, went out into the moonlight.

Now, Jasper Botterel had gone to his uncle's tent, feeling sore in the leg and sorer still in spirit. His blood was in revolt against Roger de Quintet and the king. Moreover, he hated the splendour, the chattering, and the ceremony of the court. These surroundings seemed to take the strength from his great hands and the manhood from his body.

"By St. Jude," he said to himself, "I must get out of this place of peacocks! Marry that black wench? Heaven forbid! Good uncle, the prick of that knife has put me in better spirits. Are there not the wars in Gascony, with good men being shipped across the sea? I would rather fight than be married. Heaven save us, yes!"

So Jasper crept out of Roger de Quintet's tent in the hush before the dawn, made his way to the place where the horses were tethered, took his own beast, saddled and bridled him, and rode off into the forest.

Meanwhile, that imperious and headstrong young woman, Rosamund Basset, had lost herself in the woodland, despite the light of the full moon and the promise that she had made herself that she could find her way to Winchester before the morning. There was a certain Messire René of Avranches at Winchester, a young man with a neat beard, an adroit tongue, and a fine extravagance in dress. And Rosamund had been moved to remember this René of Avranches as an avowed lover, and a probable champion who might ride off with her from under the king's nose. She had no great passion for this smiling and debonair little Frenchman, but he had made hot love to her, and Rosamund was in no need to judge either herself or others fairly.

At all events, she found that the forest was an eerie place to wander through at midnight, with its strange rustles of sound in the thick of its stillness, its huge trees black as ebony and splashed here and there with moonlight. White mists stood in the valleys, making the earth seem more vague and ghostly, and the night air raw and cold. Rosamund had been astray for more than an hour, and was climbing the slope of a low

hill, when she became aware of a luminous mist shimmering before her among the dark trunks of the trees. It was not the moonlight; Rosamund felt sure of that, and she went on cautiously, her eyes at gaze. The solitudes of the forest, its shadows, the ghostly splashes of light upon the trees, had begun to chasten the girl's audacity. It was so different groping about alone at midnight to riding a palfrey on a summer morning with young men eager for a glance from her eyes.

The foggy light ahead of her grew more distinct as she approached, and she recognised it as from the glow of a fire thrown up against the foliage of the oak trees, though the fire itself was hidden from her by the rising ground. The forest had come so near to scaring her that she felt glad of the light of a fire, taking it to be that of a charcoal burner or of some of the king's rangers.

None the less she decided that she would try to get a glimpse of the folk before she trusted them with that goodly gem—herself. People had run to wait on Rosamund ever since she could remember, and she had grown accustomed to obsequious faces. An inviolable serenity had kept her above all knowledge of the rougher and coarser realities of life.

She had come to a low bank close to the fire when a sound from the surrounding darkness startled her very shrewdly. It was only the loud snorting of a horse, but it brought a surprised cry from Rosamund's mouth. And before she could repent of it, a black figure appeared on the bank, stood there a moment outlined against the glow of the fire, and then dropped down like a hawk upon a rabbit.

Rosamund was caught by the wrist and girdle.

"Hallo—hallo! What's here?"

In the dusk she could see the whites of a man's eyes and an exuberant shadow that looked like hair.

"Let go of my wrist, dog!" said she.

"Dog, indeed!" quoth the man, holding her the tighter. "Let us see what gay moth has flown into our fire."

Heads appeared as black circles above the bank, and Rosamund found this very insolent rogue hauling her briskly into the firelight. She was too astonished for the moment to give the gentleman his due. Then she struck him across the face, and made an effort to twist herself free.

"Dog! To dare to touch the body of a great lady!"

Great lady or no, the "dog" held her the tighter, and dragged her over the bank into the full light of the fire. Rosamund found half a score rough figures crowding round her, staring in her face and fingering her clothes. There were women among the men—rough, mop-headed women, whose eyes looked red and hungry in the firelight.

"Heaven save us, here is a fine treasure!"

"Good stuff, by the feel of it!"

"Bring her to the fire, gossips, and let us see what she be made of."

The creatures hustled her into the firelight, crowding round her with a gloating and boisterous eagerness. A hand clutched at her girdle, tore it off, and brandished it in triumph. Then, in the taking of a breath, Rosamund Basset felt herself being pulled this way and that by ten pairs of hands. It was a grotesque and greedy scramble in which she was the thing scrambled for, and these creatures hounds that snapped and scuffled about the body of a fox.

In a trice her cloak and tunic were torn off, the rings slipped from her fingers, her very shoes twisted from off her feet. She was as helpless as a straw in the swirl of a mill-pool, and though she struck at the faces round her, they did not seem to feel her blows. The spoiling of this great lady was soon accomplished, and when they had stripped her to her shift, the creatures made a circle round her, mocking her to her face, and gloating over their plunder.

So Rosamund stood there under the oak trees, her black hair hanging about her, her body quivering with anger and great shame. She tried to cover her bosom with her arms, feeling herself red as the fire under the eyes of these rough men. Never had pride been stripped more thoroughly.

She still had anger in her eyes.

"Dogs," she said to them, "know that I am a ward of the king, and that you shall hang for this!"

Then they began to laugh—loud, gagging, brutal laughter that filled her with vague fear and made her shiver. The women came round her, thrusting at her with their fingers and putting out their tongues. One of them struck her upon the bosom.

"Dogs, madame, dogs!" they shouted.

"This fine lady will have us hanged!"

"Ah, we are not such lambs! We know how to take care of our own wool!"

They grew less noisy and less threatening anon, and the man who had taken the girdle and seemed the old dog of the pack, told one of the women to bring some clothes. A dirty

bundle was unrolled before the fire, and a ragged brown smock brought out. The smock was all holes and patches. The woman flung it at Rosamund's feet.

"Fine feathers for a great lady," she said. "Put it on and be thankful."

Rosamund, wondering at her own humility, and at the hot tears that began to flow, obeyed the woman, and clad herself in the ragged smock.

The men were whispering together. Two of them went off into the forest and returned with a horse and several rough ponies. Others began scattering the fire, while the man who had taken the girdle went up to Rosamund and thrust his face close up to hers.

"You will go a little journey with us, my dear," he said; "and be sure to keep that mouth of yours shut, or—" and he showed her a knife that he had hidden in his sleeve.

Rosamund looked into his insolent eyes, and knew what it was to be afraid.

"You would not kill me!" she said.

"Good manners, my dear, may save us that."

None the less, he made her stretch out her two hands, and then tied them together with a long leather thong. The other end of the thong he wrapped round his own wrist. Then they set off through the forest.

Now, it was eight of the clock next morning when Jasper Botterel rode into Winchester city, feeling himself a better man for being free of Roger de Quintet and the king. Being by no means a complete fool, he had taken the trouble to possess himself of his uncle's purse, encouraging himself with the reflection that his guardian in chivalry had probably stolen more out of his ward's manors than Jasper would ever steal from him. The young man meant to buy arms in Winchester that morning, and such gear as the war in Gascony required. He had heard it said at the king's table that ships were to put out from Portsmouth in a week to carry arms and men to Earl Simon de Montfort in Gascony.

Jasper left his horse at a hostelry, made a meal there, and was directed by the hosteler to an armourer's shop in the lower town. He soon had a hauberk under his surcoat, a shield at his back, and a helmet hanging by its laces from the crook of his left elbow. He was returning towards the hostelry, and was within forty paces of the place, when he came upon a goldsmith's shop with a fine hauberk of plated gold hanging from a beam above the counter. Jasper was looking at

this splendid coat when a man in a grey cloak came up the footway, paused outside the goldsmith's door, and began to grope for something in a leather bag. And in dragging out some cloth of Lincoln green he dragged out more than he intended, for a girdle set with purple gems fell with a clatter on the stones.

Jasper caught sight of the girdle before the man could snatch it up, and the very way the fellow snatched at it made Jasper scent him for a thief. It was the very girdle that Rosamund Basset had worn, or its twin in every way. Jasper remembered how the size of the stones had astonished him. Moreover, there was the cloth of Lincoln green.

"Heaven save us," he said to himself, as the man in the grey cloak disappeared into the goldsmith's inner door, "that was Rosamund Basset's girdle. The fellow has a villainous, thieving face. If he has stolen that girdle, how did he come by it? I have a mind to look further into this."

He reflected a moment, and, walking on to the hostelry, called for his horse, and ordered the hosteler to fill his wallet for him. When the horse was brought out to him, Jasper slung the helmet by its laces to the pommel of the saddle, but he did not mount the beast till he saw the man in the grey cloak reappear out of the goldsmith's shop.

"Here is a mad whim!" he said to himself, as he followed the man down the main street. "What is the shrew to me—or the colour of the stones in her girdle? Certainly, we men are fools. None the less, I have a mind to get the truth out of that fellow yonder."

So Jasper followed the man in the grey cloak out through the east gate of the city and over the hills into the open country. He did not hurry to come up with the gentleman till the track ran over a lonely waste, where there was no sound save the quivering song of the larks.

"Friend," said he, "I have watched your back for some miles this morning. Two on the road make the way less lonely."

The man eyed him over a surly shoulder, nor did Jasper trust the gentleman's eyes.

"A poor man must go on his own feet, lording," he said, "for the lack of an ass or a mule."

Jasper laughed as though the man had said something that was very shrewd.

"If you are so poor," he said, "how can you carry gold or precious stones in that bag of yours?"

The fellow screwed up his eyes.

"I, lording? Heaven order my good star, would that I had such stuff inside my bag!"

"Ah," said Jasper, "perhaps there is more in it than you think!"

The man blinked at him, and his eyes were like the eyes of a suspicious dog.

"Well, lording," said he, "I will gladly show you what I have in my bag."

Jasper looked the most simple and good-natured of men. The fellow came close to the horse, pretending to unfasten the bag from his girdle, but letting the folds of the cloak cover his hands.

"See here, lording," said he.

There was the flash of a knife, but Jasper had been waiting for some such trick. He caught the man's wrist, and twisted it until the sinews cracked at the shoulder joint.

"Wasp, drop that sting of yours!" he said.

The man cursed him, but dared not move because of his wrenched shoulder. He dropped the knife and began to whimper.

"I am an honest man, lording," he said; "you will not rob a poor man on the road?"

"What of that girdle set with purple stones, my friend, that you took to the goldsmith's at Winchester?"

"Girdle, lording? Stones, lording? What would a poor man like me——"

Jasper gave another twist to the rogue's arm.

"Speak the truth, you dog! I will have it out of you if I have to break every bone in your body!"

The fellow began to squeal like a stuck pig.

"Give over, lording, and I will tell you everything. Dear saints, that I will! And not one lie off the tip of my tongue!"

"Very well, my friend. Yesterday that girdle belonged to a great lady. Let us hear how you came by it, and what has befallen her."

With that great brown hand gripping his wrist, the fellow appeared to be in an incoherent hurry to tell Jasper all that he knew. He cowered under the shoulder of the young man's horse, glancing at the dropped knife that he dared not touch, and so told his story. Jasper had no doubt that it was Rosamund Basset whom these rogues had robbed and stripped in the forest.

"Heaven 'a' me," he thought to himself, "here is a pretty tangle! Confound the woman, she might have left the running away to me! What's to be done? I can't leave her to these kites."

He sat his horse in silence, holding the man's wrist and staring at the horizon.

Presently a curious slow smile began to spread across his face. His blue eyes hardened, and a gleam of audacity came into them that made the brown face look grim yet comely. The humour of the thing had found its way to Jasper's heart.

"Look you here, dog," said he, "you shall lead me to this lady."

"It shall be done, lording."

"Hold up; you may leave your knife there on the ground. Give me that bag of yours. And if you play me any tricks, my friend, you will never play another!"

So they set out, these two—Jasper with his drawn sword over his shoulder, the footpad walking two paces ahead of him, yet tied like a dog to his master by fear of that master's wrath. For Jasper Botterel in the saddle, with a sword in his hand, was not the Jasper Potterel who blundered in serving at the table of a king. The lad was a lad of the woods and moors; and the man who seems a fool under the eyes of insolent girls may be keen and grim enough when there is something to be accomplished.

The thief in the grey cloak led Jasper that day towards one of the most rogue-haunted corners in all the southern shires. Towards Alton the great road from Winchester to London plunged through the wooded defiles on the borders of two counties. Here would gather half the cut-throats in the kingdom—broken men who were ready to break the heads of all who passed along the road. The wilds about Alton were notorious. No sheriff had ever yet purged them clean of thieves and footpads. And so bold and sturdy were these gentry of the woods, that when the great fair of St. Giles was held at Winchester, five hundred armed men were mounted and sent out to keep the road open for merchandise to pass.

Jasper had heard of Alton, and as the dusk drew on, he kept a hold on his guide's grey cloak.

"Play me false, and there shall be an end of you," he said. "How much further before you show me the lady?"

"Hardly an arrow's flight, lording. But you will have to fight for her; I promise you that."

"That is my concern," said Jasper, staring into the dusk.

Presently the thief turned aside from the road, and followed a path that plunged into the woods. It began to be very dark, and Jasper kept a firm hold on the fellow, and was on his guard against any trick. Through the gloomy tangle of the woods he saw a

faint light shining, and Jasper guessed it to be the light of a fire.

Jasper drew in and considered the matter, holding the footpad by the cloak. He knew that the fellow would betray him at the first chance, but there was one rough way of silencing a dog, and Jasper chose it, since no other offered. He brought the pommel of his sword down on the man's pate—not hard enough to crack it, but sufficiently hard to keep him quiet for half an hour. Then he rode on softly towards the fire, dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree.

When Jasper came crawling up on his belly, he saw three men and two women sitting within the circle of light cast by the fire. One of the women sat a little apart, and Jasper could see that her wrists were tied to her ankles. And a transfigured Rosamund was this, wrapped in a dirty smock that covered hardly her bosom, her bare feet blistered and scratched, her black hair hanging about her face. She looked so forlorn and chastened that Jasper felt sorry for the girl, though he guessed that it was good for pride to go in rags for a day.

The three men and the other woman were bending over something that they had unwrapped from a cloth, when Jasper sprang on them out of the shadows. The men tumbled aside, cursing and groping for their arms. The woman pulled a brand from the fire, and hurled it at Jasper's head. But Jasper caught the burning wood on his shield, and cut down the first man who came up against him.

The woman tried to trip him by throwing herself under his feet, but Jasper was not to be fooled. He sprang over her at the second man—sent him staggering with a thrust of the shield, and cut his legs from under him before he could recover. The third man did not wait for Jasper's sword, but took to his heels and ran, followed by the woman who had flung the burning brand at Jasper's head.

Rosamund Basset, her mouth a black oval in a white face, waited for what should follow. Jasper had no badge upon his surcoat, and no arms upon his shield, and his helmet hid his face. He bent over Rosamund, cut with his sword the thongs that bound her, and, picking her up in his arms, walked off into the woods.

"Have no fear," said he; "it is all for the best."

When he came to his horse, he lifted her on to the beast's back, mounted behind her, and made for the road. The moon was

coming up above the trees, huge and tawny, and Jasper saw the road like a white ribbon before him. As for Rosamund, she clung to him and said nothing.

Jasper pricked up his horse to a canter, thinking many thoughts under that helmet of his. For a moment he was half tempted to laugh over the shrewd suggestiveness of the adventure, but they were not out of the Alton woods as yet, and the girl's frightened face sobered him.

"Courage!" said he, deepening his voice so as to deceive her. "We must get away from this wasps' nest."

Rosamund shivered as though with cold. She held to Jasper with both her hands, her hair blowing over his shoulder.

"Sir," she said quite humbly, "out of my heart I thank you for this."

"You can thank me presently," he answered, "when we have put seven miles between us and these woods."

Jasper drew in his tired horse at last, and got down out of the saddle to ease the beast, leaving Rosamund up above. There was not a light to be seen, and Jasper remembered the many miles that his horse had covered, and the warmth of the moonlight night. Rosamund had come near falling asleep in his arms, and, with the moonlight on her tired face, it had seemed to Jasper that she looked far less shrewish.

"Madame," he asked her, "where would you have me take you?"

She glanced at him trustingly.

"To Winchester."

"We shall not reach Winchester to-night," he said, "and I must rest my horse. There are no lights to be seen. I can shelter you in some wood."

Rosamund shivered.

"The woods are so dark and terrible, and these wretches frightened me so brutally in the forest."

"There is the moon," he answered, "and I shall watch."

"Ah," she exclaimed, "how much I owe you! But for your strength and hardihood—"

"Say nothing of that," he said. "If you will rest here, I will keep you from all peril."

They came to a beech wood by the road, and Jasper tied his horse to a tree, gathered dry leaves together, spread his surcoat upon them, and so made her a bed. Then he brought out bread and wine from his wallet, and bade her eat and drink.

"You, too, must be hungry?" she asked him.

"That is a sensible question," he retorted.

"Ah, then, I have something more to ask you."

"Well?" said he, breaking a crust of bread.

"Tell me the name of the man who has saved me from something worse than death."

Jasper sat amid the dead beech leaves and stared at the moon. His face was still hidden from Rosamund by his helmet.

"To-morrow I will tell it you," he said.

"Go to sleep now and have no fear."

Rosamund laid herself down, wrapping the surcoat round her, and Jasper wandered off into the moonlight to see if he could find a stream or a pool where he could water his horse. He found a spring not very far away, and led his horse down to it to drink. When he returned to the beech wood, he heard the girl's voice calling him.

"Where are you—where are you?"

"Truly," thought Jasper, "how things have changed with her!"

He tethered his horse where the beast could crop some grass, and went back to Rosamund.

"Did you call?" he asked.

"Oh, I was afraid you had left me!"

"I had gone to water my horse."

She was sitting up and shivering, her eyes looking large and restless.

"I am so greatly afraid," she said. "I never used to be afraid, but these rough people seem to have frightened the heart out of me. Being alone makes me shiver. You do not know how I envy you being so strong and brave."

Jasper smiled in the darkness.

"I will sit near you all night and watch," he said.

"Then I shall have no fear. My heart is very grateful."

So Rosamund Basset fell asleep; and the moonlight found its way between the beech trees and touched her face, making it look soft, white, and even desirable. Jasper sat there, thinking his own thoughts, and smiling over the whimsical contradictoriness of it all, in that they had run away from each other only to fall into such a gallant adventure.

"Madame Rosamund," he said to himself, "you look a fine lady lying there asleep. Who would have thought this morning that I should carry you in my arms? And, by my soul, it was not unpleasant! What will you say, good wench, when I let you see my face?"

When Rosamund Basset woke, the dawn

was up, and all the world aglitter with sunlight and with dew. The beech leaves shivered above her head, and white clouds moved across the sky. She started up, looking about her as though frightened, and then smiled when she saw Jasper wiping the dust and dew from his harness. He turned his head and glanced at her, and Rosamund wondered why he still wore that helmet.

Suddenly her eyes fell upon the rags that covered her, and she went red from bosom to forehead. Were there ever such rags and such a tangle of hair? Her bare feet, too, were covered with dust and blood, and the shame of her body made her humble.

"Dear Heaven," said she, drawing the ragged smock up over her bosom, "I am not fit for the daylight!"

"There is my surcoat," he said; "it will serve to cover that smock."

He looked away while she slipped into the surcoat.

"If you could bring me some water?"

Jasper filled a stone bottle at the spring. He came and knelt down by Rosamund and washed her feet, binding them up with some linen that he had in his wallet, and doing it very cleverly, as one used to imping the wing of a hawk. Rosamund's eyes dilated and filled with a curious soft light. She watched the great brown hands, and for a moment they seemed familiar.

"How very gentle you are!" she said.

"And yet you called me a fool," he answered.

"I? Never! You, who fought three men!"

"They were poor stuff. Nevertheless, you called me a fool."

Her eyes dilated.

"Let me see your face," she said.

And Jasper uncovered his head to her.

At the sight of his face, Rosamund went as red as the heart of a pomegranate. The coy tenderness went out of her eyes, the red mouth hardened, the black brows approached one another.

"Sir," said she, "what trick have you been playing me?"

"No trick at all," he answered her. "I was running away to the wars for fear of having to marry you. As for the king and his people, they had turned my man's blood into milk."

Rosamund stared at him, and then burst out laughing.

"To think that—you—ran away!"

"It was honest sense," he retorted. "You thought me a fool, and I saw that you were



"Jasper uncovered his head."

a shrew. Only Heaven's chance put me upon this adventure. A thief came to a goldsmith's in Winchester to sell your girdle. I happened to set eyes on that girdle. I thought I would follow that thief a little way before I went to the wars."

Rosamund was silent a moment, looking at him with intent and questioning eyes.

"You took my rescue upon you," she said.

"Jasper, the double fool!"

"Forget that word for a moment. Heaven help me, what a fright I have had! And but for you——"

Jasper cut short her reflections by getting up to untether his horse.

"There is nothing for me to boast about," he said; "it was just an adventure that a man meets with on the road. You are for Winchester, are you not?"

"Winchester," she echoed, eyeing him with critical interest.

"When you are safe in Winchester, we can laugh and go our ways. You will be rid of the fool, and I of the shrew!"

It was noon before they came to a hill that overlooked the city. Jasper had walked beside his horse, and had told her of his plans for the Gascon wars, talking gravely of the sea passage, and of the honour a man might gain by serving under Earl Simon. Rosamund had looked down under her lashes at Jasper, and wondered at the change that had come over him since yesterday. Her woman's heart felt vague stirrings of penitence and regret, and the quiet, smiling light in his eyes troubled her.

"So you will go to the wars?" she said at

last, piqued in spite of herself by the young man's composure.

He looked up at her with a gleam of the eyes.

"Am I not saving a shrew from marrying a fool?"

"Jasper!"

"Well, madame?"

"Do you think I look so ill-tempered? I am not such a shrew, really."

"Ah," said he, "perhaps, too, I am not such a fool! But let us forget that. And now that I am come to look at you, I am almost ready to be scolded."

Rosamund was silent a while, with her eyes turned towards Winchester. She was thinking of René, the Frenchman, with his peaked beard and nimble ways, and, somehow, this René appeared to her suddenly as a pitiable fop.

"They do not make men at the king's court," she said.

"You are very generous," he answered.

"Am I? Well, Jasper, you can run away from me now as soon as you please."

Jasper's brown face showed that he was thinking.

"Supposing that I do not choose to run away?" he asked.

"Well—oh, well!" she answered vaguely.

He looked up at her, and in his eyes there was something of mastery. A brown hand was stretched out to touch her fingers, and Rosamund suffered it.

"May I be called a fool if I run away," he said. "As for Roger de Quintet, my uncle—if you ask me, I will pull his beard!"

GOBLIN GRASS.

GOBLIN Grass grows in the night,
 Green as green, and bright as bright;
 Stars can see it, and the moon,
 And everyone who sings a tune,
 Sailing-men, and lads with packs,
 All with knapsacks on their backs.
 Every child who tries to find
 Where the sun falls, and the wind,
 And older folk who wait and knit,
 Know what glamour lies in it.
 Oh, many, when the day is new,
 Seek for it and find it, too;
 And everyone at last shall pass
 All alone through Goblin Grass!

AGNES GROZIER HERBERTSON.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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Mellicent

BY WARWICK DEEPING

WITH her ragged frock blowing about her knees, and her black hair tossing against the red rim of the sky, Mellicent, old Huguette's grandchild, came running over the purple moor. From the hovel among the stunted pines rose the shrill scolding of a woman's voice. Huguette, hook-nosed shrew, stood within the doorway of the hovel, beating her fist in the face of the rising moon. Her querulous cursing, discordant as a jay's chatter, died down into the moan of the wind amid the trees.

Mellicent, tall, agile, long of limb, skipped over the grass tussocks and the tufts of heather, with her red mouth twitching, her eyes afire. She knitted her black brows over the old woman's cursing, beat the air with her open hands. Sullen and petulant was the white face that sped towards the moon over the wild moor.

The smart of the leather thong still burnt upon the girl's shoulder; but not so fierce was it as the glow within her heart. Blows, cursings, hunger, and hard toil, such was life in the moorland hovel. Yonder, too, was the great stupid moon staring at her out of the sky as it ever stared upon her bitterness and discontent. She choked as she thought of it all, brushed the tears out of her eyes, stumbled half blindly over a knot of heather. Child rebel, her heart was not in her that night, full of the unreasoning ecstacy of youth, wistful even in the full flux of anger. She beat her bosom with her fists, tossed back her hair from her half-bare shoulders, plucked away a bramble that had clutched her about the ankle.

Growing less passionate betimes, she stopped running, and idled over the moor, with a peevish drooping of her lower lip. Her dark eyes shot restless glances hither and thither over the wild hills. The sun had gone; bats were flitting against the faint afterglow; an owl hooted; she heard the rattling whir of a

nightjar in the woods. Lagging a little, she brooded on over the grass and heather, amid the furze-bushes and the golden broom. Her heart seemed to grow tired of a sudden, for she drooped her shoulders, crossed her two hands over her breast.

Beneath, in a huge hollow, the deep woods spread their black masses over the edge of the moor. Their thousand pinacles were silvered by the moon, ribbed with silver like a midnight sea. To the south a white road curled over the hills towards Gloriac by the sea. Down in the deep valleys a stream curled slowly, winding dimly amid the hills.

Mellicent stepped out of a sudden, stood motionless like a wild thing at gaze. A faint cry seemed to come to her out of the vast unknown, like the hoarse death-shout of a stricken man. Vague and weird, it seemed to pass and die on the breath of the wind. Shivering a little, the girl crossed herself, gave but little heed, being bred to the wood cries and the mysterious voices of the wild.

In the hollow the dark trees called to her, beckoning faintly with their waving boughs. Mellicent loved the forest with its tangled gloom, where the shadows danced and the bracken grew. It was the wood-fay's haunt, the wild bird's home, an eerie garden to such as she. Her eyes dilated as she gazed on the forest, caught up the moonlight, grew more mysterious and bright. She took her breath with little gasps of awe, drew her ragged smock round her, smiled strangely, and wandered on.

Going down the steep shoulder of the moor, she came to where the white road curled towards the trees. Very white and lonely it seemed as Mellicent picked her way amid the gorse and heather. She could see the bracken waving about the black alleys of the woods. Suddenly against the white road the girl saw a black shape move into the moonlight,

with a faint jingling as of a bridle of steel. It was a riderless horse that had trotted out from amid the bracken, neighing and tossing his black mane. Mellicent sank down behind a gorse-bush like a lark into the grass, peered round, and watched the beast as it moved to and fro.

Elf-child that she was, she began to crawl down towards the road, where a broad bank of bracken waved betwixt it and the woods. Crawling through, often lifting her white face into the moonlight, she came to a stretch of grass-land running from the forest. The horse had trotted back from the road. She saw him nosing something that lay half hidden by the bracken close under the boughs of the solemn pines.

Mellicent, crouching there, hesitated on the brink of the open grass-land. Debating with herself, she turned and held for the shadow of the woods, and gaining the trees, rose up and ran through the flickering moonlight. Slipping from trunk to trunk, as she neared the open, the girl drew close to the horse standing in the bracken. Gaining courage, she slipped out into the moonlight—a slim shadow with gleaming feet, her hair blown by the freshening wind. The horse, catching sight of her, threw up his head and trotted back towards the road.

Mellicent, with her heart hurrying, and her eyes shining against the moon, crept round the bracken with outstretched hands. Suddenly she came to a great furrow where the feathery fronds were trampled as though men had been fighting there. Peering over with uplifted chin, she saw the gleam of a helmet and the silver streak of a naked sword. A man lay prone there, half turned upon his face, with his shield broken under his arm.

Mellicent, scared for the moment, stared at the man over the bracken. But she was no coward, this girl of the moors, and her heart was warm under her ragged smock. The true instinct, a woman's pity for a wounded man, woke in her quickly under the moon. She lost all fear in a flood of compassion, crept near, and bent over the fallen man. One glance told her that he was no common fellow, for his rich surcoat and his well-wrought harness made her wise as to his true estate.

Bending down so that her face was close to his, she peered within his basinet, laid her right hand over his heart. She felt the breath stir in him, knew that he was quick as yet. There was an ugly gash on the left side of his helmet, through which blood had oozed and clotted the clean steel; hesitating no longer, she sat down and lifted the man's head into her lap. Her fingers were soon busy at the laces of his helmet. She lifted the thing off, looking long into his face.

It was a strong face, neither young nor old, with a big, clean-shaven jaw and a broad forehead. The man's short black hair was matted with blood, yet the sight did not sicken her. She told herself with an unconscious pleasure that he was a handsome fellow, deserving of her very good favor. He had been set upon by footpads out of the forest, taken at a disadvantage, smitten down by some un-knightly blow.

So, with a quaint innocence, she turned his head upon her knee, bent over him, and kissed his lips. No doubt her warm mouth woke him, for he opened his eyes, and looked at her like a man waking from a dream.

Being so cunningly and unpardonably caught, Mellicent smiled at him with her dark eyes, blushed beneath her warm and sun-browned skin. She gathered bracken with one hand, put the man's head from off her lap, upon the green pillow she had made. He still seemed half stupid with the blow that had cleft such a rent in his iron casque.

"I will fetch water," she said, slipping away with a lithe timidity, and bending over him a minute with innocent earnestness.

"Who are you, child?"

"Old Huguette's granddaughter," she answered him. "Lie still, sir. I will fetch water and wash your wound."

The man looked at her in a dazed way, struggled upon his elbow, fell back again as into a second faint. Mellicent was on her knees beside him, her black hair sweeping his blazoned surcoat.

"Lie still," she said, with a hand over his heart; "you are weak as yet."

Then, seeing that he would obey her, and that his wound still bled, she picked

herself up, and flitted like an elf over the wild moor. There was a strange new glow in her young heart, a mysterious light in her dark eyes. As she ran, she remembered the man's face, the clean curve of the strong chin, the way his eyes had opened when she had kissed his lips. Magic stirred under the moon that night; the wind felt warm to Mellicent as she ran.

Soon she came to the thatched hovel, saw a rushlight glimmering through the dirty horn pane. Creeping to the door, she peered in, saw old Huguette asleep on some straw in the corner. Mellicent went in like a mouse, took her clean Sunday undersmock that hung from a peg over the bed, wrapped a new loaf therein, and picked up a brown pitcher that stood on the rough table. In the taking of twenty breaths she was out again into the moonlight, skimming over the moor, the loaf in the white smock clasped close to her bosom. Full of a mischievous delight and strange, unfathomable joy, she sped fast over the heather, struck the woods and the broken bracken where the wounded man lay.

The black horse had drawn near to where his master lay, and was cropping peacefully at the grass. Setting her loaf and pitcher down, Mellicent glided towards the good beast, stroked the soft muzzle that was stretched timidly towards her. Her hand caught the bridle; the horse followed readily enough under her coaxing, and she tethered him to a tree. Then she ran back to the wounded man, took her white undersmock, ripped it with her strong young hands, and kneeling with the water-pot beside her, set to to cleanse his wound. When she had done this, she bound it up with a clean strip of the coarse linen, the man watching her with his sad eyes the while, speaking never a word.

Then, quite suddenly, he caught her hands, drew them to his lips, kissed the brown fingers.

"God's blessing on you!" he said.

Mellicent, red to her sunburnt shoulders, lost all her masterfulness of a sudden, grew shy as some brown-winged bird. She half knelt there, sitting upon her heels, one hand still resting in the man's, her eyes quivering over his face.

Half clumsily, as though to ease her

shyness, she seized the water-pot, thrust it towards his mouth.

"Drink," she said.

Then, seeing that his hands trembled, she put an arm under his shoulders, supported him as he drank. Her hair fell down and touched his forehead. She tossed it back with a little laugh and laid him back again upon the bracken. Catching up the loaf, she broke the crust from it, and gave him some of the soft brown heart to eat. Holding it in his big white hands, he lay still and watched her, with a species of awe that was very magical.

"Who are you, child?" he asked, of a sudden.

She held her breath, remembered old Huguette and the mean hovel, felt shame at her own poverty and the lowly nature of her home.

"Lord, I am nobody," she said.

"Shall I believe that?"

"A beggar girl," she added; "my lord will scorn me when the daylight comes."

The man flushed and his eyes kindled. "By God!" he said, half angrily, "I would break any man's head who said as much."

Mellicent colored even as the man had done. She put back her hair from off her forehead, looked steadily into the man's face, her eyes solemn under her arched brows.

"I am but a beggar girl," she said.

"Why, then, I am a beggar man," quoth he, with a bright flash of his honest eyes.

Mellicent, pondering his safety in her heart, remembered an open barrow in the woods—a mound that had been rifled by plunderers half a century ago. Mellicent had often lain hid there, watching the birds, and the sunlight sifting through the trees. The barrow was not far from the road, so without further parley she told the man of it, persuaded him to try his strength, so that he might lie safely hid under the tall pines. He rose up slowly, found his head steadier than he had guessed after the ringing cut he had had on his helmet. Mellicent gave him her shoulder to lean upon, and setting her right arm round him, took him slowly into the wood. As they went, he told her how he had been surprised and beaten down by some half-score ruffians. They

had dragged him into the bracken, taken his purse, and left him for dead.

It was not long before they reached the barrow—a broad mound under the tall trees. The hollow excavated in the slope had been carpeted and roofed with dead heather and reeds. Mellicent saw her man safely lodged therein, then ran back to fetch his sword and shield, the water-pot and the loaf of bread. When she had brought them to the barrow, she left him for the night, and wandered home over the wild moor.

When dawn came, Sir John of Saintré sat with his back propped against the earthen wall of the barrow, watching the sun steal through the branches of the thousand trees. His black horse was tethered near; sword and shield lay safe beside him, with the water-pot and the brown loaf. The man felt the better in soul for Mellicent the moor girl's elfish charity. Nor was he greatly the worse for the night's adventure, save that the rogues had stolen his purse.

Propped against the wall of the barrow, he watched the stretch of greensward before him, streaked with the straight fir boles and their slanting shadows. He was a handsome fellow, was John of Saintré; no comely boy or perfumed profligate, but a sturdy gentleman with a broad, brave face. There were many lines about his mouth, a suggestion of sadness in his eyes. His black hair was slightly gray about the temples, giving a mature melancholy to his face. He had the air of a man who had seen much of the world and its ways, was no mere server of pomp and circumstance.

As he sat there, very grave of face, with the sunlight streaming overhead, he put the palms of his hands together and, like a good knight, said his prayers. Before he had come to the last "Pater," a more subtle tenderness gathered in his eyes. He even colored like a brown-faced boy, for he had heard the sound of a girl's voice as she came singing through the woods. Soon he saw the flash of a green smock, the gleam of a white face under the trees.

Mellicent, sly witch, had waited till old Huguette had gone to tend her cows. She had hurried on her best smock of apple-green cloth, and stolen the last red

rose from the one bush in the rough garden. Slipping like moonlight over the moor, she had plunged into the woods with a warm glow on her peevish face. She had combed out her long black hair that morning, so that it shone and shimmered in the sunlight. The red rose she had fastened over her heart, and thus, with her innocent vanity appeased, she came to the barrow under the trees.

Very shy, too, she seemed as she stood at the entry and looked down at the man, twisting her black hair round her wrist. Sir John saw a slim girl with dusky eyes, set like sapphires in a milk-white face aureoled by a cloud of raven hair. Her little feet were roughly shod, her green smock caught round the waist with an old red scarf. Yet she pleased him strangely with her innocent beauty, her elfish eyes, and half-timid grace.

"Come, little sister," he said, stretching out a hand to her, "sit here by me and tell me your name."

"Mellicent," she answered, without moving, casting down her glances over her coarse shoes and bare ankles.

"Mellicent," he echoed; "there is much in a name, methinks—the scent of the pine woods, the gold and purple of the moors. Mellicent, I thank thee with all my heart."

She brightened a little, though the knowledge still haunted her that she was old Huguette's grandchild, a beggar girl bred in a moorland hovel.

"Let not my lord thank me," she said; "his thanks are not for such as me."

"Say you so?" he said, gazing with a queer smile into her face.

"The great ladies, sir, who are your fellows, would draw away their gowns from my bare feet."

"Child," he answered her, "I have seen enough of these great ladies whom you speak of."

"They are very proud, my lord."

"More proud than noble. May I be defended, sister, from women who broider their souls upon their sleeves."

Sir John and Mellicent of the moor talked much together that day, while the man rested himself, and suffered her to tend him with meek hands and bended head. She had a wonderful charm, this dark-eyed elf, with her white face and her pouting, petulant lips. Her quaint



A MAN LAY PRONE THERE, HALF TURNED UPON HIS FACE

yet solemn prattling seemed to the man more magical than the fine vaporings he had heard in court and in garden. Innocent she was, yet not a cloying saint; clean withal, yet warm and red as the rose upon her breast. Her black hair gleamed about her wistful face. Her brown neck was very stately despite her lowly birth.

So the day passed in quaint comradeship and in wanderings through the woods. And when evening came, Sir John had recovered his due strength again. He took his shield and sword, while the black horse neighed to him, tossed his great head, and hungered for the road. As for Mellicent, she hated the full moon that climbed slowly in the summer sky. Yet she had pride and courage in her untamed heart, knew her own poverty and the meanness of her birth.

At the edge of the wood Sir John took leave of her, his shield upon his arm.

"Mellicent," he said, "God bless thee, child; come, give me your lips."

She kissed him sadly, looking not in his face, but into the distance, as though she feared her tears.

"May my lord prosper," she said, anon; "I have but served him as a poor child should."

The man caught up the red rose out of her bosom, begged of her the old scarf about her body. Wondering, she gave it him, her mouth adroop, her eyes dusky with unshed tears.

"Would my lord wear a beggar's scarf?"

He kissed her again with strange goodwill, bade her be of good courage and to remember his face. He climbed into the saddle, slowly, like a man loath to go. Mellicent watched him ride over the moor where the white road curled towards the west. On the hill he turned to her against the golden sky, waved his sword and the scarf she had given him. Then the night came and she saw him no more.

Very slowly went those midsummer days for Mellicent in old Huguette's hovel. She was as a girl who had tasted the red wine of womanhood; all else seemed sour to her after such sweet nectar. Those days she became as a dream-child, a creature craving for the deeper desires

of life, a richer riddle for her own unravelling. No more could the wild woods comfort her, for they indeed were as sad as she, making their moan under the white moon. Often she would go and brood amid the broken bracken where Sir John of Saintr  had lain with his wound.

As for old Huguette, she seemed to grow more sour and savage with each setting of the sun. The leather thong she used no longer, for Mellicent had turned on her with eyes afire, and a strong young arm that forbade such chastenings. Yet old Huguette's tongue was more rasping than a cow's, and was more wicked than her whip. The girl grew sullen under the eternal tyranny, the voluble grumbling of the old scold. She began to dream of flitting thence; for was she not seventeen, and a full-grown woman?

One evening a tall fellow came tramping over the moor—an archer, his bow at his back, a short sword on his thigh. He was a bluff, red-faced being, with keen blue eyes and an honest manner. He stopped at the hovel door, found old Huguette at her rickety spinning-wheel, bribed her temper with a silver piece. He sought a lodging for the night, he said, and old Huguette received him because of the silver.

The man of the bow was a merry fellow, with a cunning tongue and a mellow laugh. Mellicent trusted him through some instinct of the heart, smiled at him as he sat on a stool and told old Huguette of the great tourney that was to be held at Gloriac in two days' time. He pictured the gay sights to them, the great gathering there would be there, the good money that might be made with eggs and herbs. So well did he win the old woman's ear that Huguette poked out her chin over the news, and her little eyes grew bright with greed.

"Grandam," said the archer, "what say you?—let us join forces. There is your gray donkey tethered yonder; I see two panniers in the corner. Come to Gloriac and fill your stocking."

Old Huguette grinned and looked the man all over.

"Let the wench come too," he added; "it must be dull for ye on this moor. Buy the girl a bunch of ribbons, grandam, to dress her black hair."

Mellicent marvelled at the man's impudence, for neither saint nor demon had moved old Huguette for two years or more from the moorland hovel. Whether it was the archer's clever tongue, or the vision of silver falling into her lap, Huguette commended him, and vowed she would travel. Thus the next dawn they sallied over the moor towards Gloriac and the sea.

As for Mellicent, her woodland heart was full of strange dreams and idle fantasies. Had not Gloriac received Sir John? Might she not light on him in that same town? She kept her counsel, however, because of old Huguette, who rode between the laden panniers, while Jehan the archer walked at her side.

Mellicent waxed inquisitive anon, and began to gossip with the man of the bow.

"There will be many great gentlemen at the jousting?" she asked.

Jehan beamed at her like a brother.

"Many a good knight, Mistress Greenfrock," he said; "you shall see such splintering of spears! God give the best man joy of his lady."

"And they will have a queen of the joust?" she asked, with her face aglow.

"Truth, yes," he said, thinking how fair she was—"a proud countess or some gaudy dame with half a duchy on her back. Yet, I vow, many of them would give broad lands for a pair of eyes and a mouth like thine."

Mellicent colored, and drew away from him with a girlish dignity that she did not dissemble. Her temper seemed to please the man as he watched her lithe, graceful figure, the proud pose of her head, the firm way she planted her roughly shod feet. She had been building visions in her moorland heart, only to find them impossibly fair. She remembered her coarse clothes and the squalid hovel as she glanced at old Huguette's ugly face. Why had not God made her a great lady? Was she too mean to dream and to desire?

Towards evening the three came by the road through green meadows towards the towers of Gloriac. Calm woods steeped in sunlight stretched about the meadows, even to the sea. Many banners were waving on the walls of the town; its towers gleamed white; its spires glistened against the west. In the meadows under

the walls stood many pavilions, red, purple, and green, snow white and azure. Before them on spears hung painted shields, rich in color and quaint device. Craftsmen were setting up the lists without the town, covering the galleries with garlands and fine cloth. There were many blithe folk in the meadows, thronging under the solemn trees—girls in gay gowns, their hair trimmed with ribbons; men and youths,—a merry mob. Near the northern gate of the town a fair was in progress, thronged by holiday folk who bought and sold.

Through the meadows, full of the scent and laughter of youth, came Mellicent and old Huguette with Jehan the archer. They seemed out of keeping with the colored company, for their clothes were dusty and none too new. Some scoffed at old Huguette as she passed by on her donkey, and rallied Jehan on the length of his legs. The archer took their quips in good part, a broad smile on his good-tempered face. But with Mellicent the gibes went home, barbed as they were with bitter mirth. Her coarse green smock seemed to burn her bosom, and her rough shoes hurt her dusty feet. Yet she trod the road with her chin in the air, her eyes defiant in her lovely face. She was poor, no doubt; should she show her shame before chits whose comeliness lay in their sleeves?

They came to the gate and entered Gloriac, Jehan leading the donkey by the bridle. He took them to a mean hostel in a poor quarter of the town, and paid for their lodging out of his own purse.

The sun shone on the Gloriac meadows, though the solemn woods were steeped in mist. A film of dust shimmered over the "lists," where pennons were blowing, color and steel flashing over the greensward.

"By St. Jude!" quoth an old bravo in a battered bassinet, thrusting his red face over the barriers, "mark him of the Black Leopard. A pot of ale on it, he'll smite the Green Trefoil over his horse's tail."

"Not he," quoth another.

"Red's my man," quoth a fat miller,— "yon gentleman with the red shield and the green trappings. As likely a knight as ever held spear."



SIR JOHN SHOOK HIS SPEAR AT THE LADIES WHO SNEERED

"True for you, miller," said Jehan of the bow, who had Mellicent bulwarked behind his shoulder; "watch the Knight of the Red Torch, sirs; he'll set the 'lists' afire."

That morning old Huguette had gotten her rough stool and established herself outside the northern gate, with her panners before her. She had vowed that she would rather sell ten eggs than watch the gentlemen breaking spears on each other's shields. Jehan had taken Mellicent under his escort, not a little to Dame Huguette's displeasure, who disliked the business, and was jealous despite her threescore years and ten. The archer and the moor maiden had passed early through the meadows, watched the knights arming in their pavilions, and won a place behind the barriers opposite the great gallery and the Joust Queen's throne.

Mellicent looked wild and winsome as a wood-elf from Dian's train. Her pale cheeks were flushed, her eyes asparkle in the sun. She had forgotten her coarse clothes in the delight of the dawn, the stir and bustle, and the music and the brave din. Jehan watched the sunlight on her face, smiled under his bushy brows, and stroked his short brown beard. He kept himself between her and the crowd, so that she suffered no rude jostling, nor the rough insolence of bony elbows.

The jousting had begun before noon, with much blowing of trumpets, lusty work, full of pomp and pride under the summer sun. The galleries were filled with dames and maidens of noble birth, the splendor of youth decked with diverse colors. Mellicent with her solemn eyes watched the knights hurtling against each other, splintering spears, thundering over the wounded grass, with the hot ardor of chivalry in their horses' heels. She saw many a good man go down into the dust. Jehan, who seemed strangely wise in the matter of blazonings, told her the names of many who stood or were smitten down.

Yet through the glory of it all, the clangor of trumpets and the flash of arms, Mellicent's heart grew heavy once more as she remembered her poverty and her mean estate. Like a beggar child she stood gazing through the bars of a

closed gate at a life she might neither share nor know. What was she but a brown, black-eyed bird beside those proud women with their brodered robes, their gleaming tissues, and their cloth of gold. They would scorn her, these great ones, for her coarse clothes, her bare ankles, and her wild moorland ways. Once more she fell into discontent as she gazed at the galleries and their burden of beauty.

Jehan's voice rang out beside her, rousing her from the bitterness of her girlish reverie.

"Wake, dreamer," he said.

Mellicent turned her eyes towards his face. "Why do you shout?" she said, peevishly.

"It is the last course," he answered, trembling like a hound held well in leash; "see, they joust for the garland, these two, the Black Chevron and he of the Scarlet Torch."

Mellicent looked into the "lists," saw the master-at-arms and the heralds standing, the two knights ready at either end, the one in red, the other in sable. Silence had fallen upon the galleries and the eager crowds about the barriers. Mellicent's eyes remained fixed on the knight with the red torch on his gilded shield. She nudged the archer with her elbow as she caught the ardor of the hour.

"Whom do you favor?" she asked him.

"And you?" he retorted.

"Red Torch."

Jehan pinched her cheek. "By God! well chosen," he said; "yonder gentleman shall surely win."

A trumpet wailed, and the two knights feuted their spears. In the taking of a breath they had sprung away and were smoking over the dusty grass. Mellicent heard the spear-points ring on the painted shields, saw the man of the Black Chevron reel and go heavily to earth.

A great shout went up from about the lists.

"He of the Red Torch wins," they cried.

"The Queen, the Queen."

"Now for the crowning."

They were taking away the Black Knight's horse, and his squires were bending over him, unlacing his helmet. Mellicent glanced into Jehan's face. He was laughing, yet with great tears running down his nut-brown cheeks. She was

amazed at the sight, caught his sleeve, questioned him mutely with her eyes.

"Let it pass," he said, brushing the tears away, and setting his cap on the end of his bow. "That was a great thrust. God and St. James for the Scarlet Torch!"

The knight in red was riding round the lists, gazing not into the galleries where the dames and the noble maidens sat, but over the wooden barriers at the common crowd. Mellicent watched him with half-conscious pride. Beside her Jehan was waving his cap on the end of his bow, while the knight on the black horse came riding slowly along the barriers.

Mellicent, watching him, held her breath, went white of a sudden under her raven hair. The man had a red scarf knotted round his arm, and in his helmet he carried a faded rose. The gilded wreath dangled on his spear-point that he was to give to her whom he held most fair.

Suddenly she felt herself lifted in Jehan's arms, set upon his shoulder above the heads of the people. The great knight had halted before the barriers; his spear swayed down, a black streak in the sunlight; the wreath dangled before Mellicent's hands.

Half frightened and incredulous, she took the thing from off the spear, while the crowd cheered her and the Knight of the Red Torch. The man on the black horse came close to the barrier; Jehan set her behind him on the saddle. With the knights-at-arms and the heralds following at his horse's heels, he bore Mellicent to where the throne was set under a canopy of purple cloth. The great ladies in the galleries marvelled and sniggered at such a choice, and waved no handkerchiefs when her name was called.

Thus was Mellicent of the Moor crowned queen of the lists for the first day's jousting at Gloriac by the sea. When the Knight of the Red Torch came to be crowned and the heralds unhelmed him at Mellicent's feet, the girl gazed on

the face of Sir John, the man she had nursed that night in the woods. Red to the lips, she set the garland upon his brows, marvelling greatly that he had honored her thus.

But when night came, Mellicent of the Moor had passed from the towers of Gloriac into the wilds. Sir John had taken her upon his horse and laughed at the ladies who had sneered at the girl. He shook his spear at them, and rode for the woods, with the sturdy Jehan trudging at his horse's heels.

That night they lodged them in the woods under the placid face of the moon. Mellicent sat on a fallen tree, with the man she had served unhelmed beside her. There was a great light in Sir John's dark eyes. He unwound the red scarf from his sword-arm, kissed it, and spread it over Mellicent's knees.

"Behold," he said, "have I not taught these proud ones that love can shine without cloth of gold? Mellicent, child, you have won me honor. Lo! I offer you back my heart."

She gazed at him wondrously, even like one whose dreams had been answered by a miracle out of heaven.

"Lord," she said, "I am a beggar girl. Should a great knight mate with me?"

"Tell me," he answered her, "are you not fair?"

She reddened and hid her face in her hands.

"And good?" he said, touching her hair. "My God, what better joy can a man have than the love of a good maid, be she rich or poor?"

"Lord," she answered him, "I am dumb before you."

He took her hands from before her eyes. There was such a light on the man's face that Mellicent had no fear of him nor of her own heart.

"God bless thee!" he said, holding her hands. "Behold, I kneel to you. Is that not love?"

Mellicent kissed him on the mouth. Nor did the man regret, when his hair was white, that he had won the moor child for his wife in the meadows of Gloriac.



Illustration for "Mellicent"

See page 257

MELLICENT STOOD MOTIONLESS, LIKE A WILD THING AT GAZE

THE POOL IN THE FOREST

By WARWICK DEEPING

Illustrated by H. M. Paget



ISTS were gathering in the valley meadows when John Giffard rode through the eastern purlieus that lay between the forest and Fulk de Corbil's castle of Brent.

On the west, a great beech wood went up against the pale gold of the sunset, and southwards lay a mysterious smother of moorlands and of bog. Fulk de Corbil's valley was a deep, green trough, its black castle and the black water about it softened and made to look more vague and distant by the rising mists.

The King's forest stretched for three leagues west of Brent Castle, and John Giffard was the King's master-forester and lord of the deer.

He had turned his horse into White Hart Walk, and was going softly over the forest turf, when he saw something moving ahead of him, a grey shape that looked like a shred of mist drifting between the trees.

Now, Giffard's men had been talking of a ghost that they had seen in the outlying woods towards Brent. Mat of the Moor swore that he had sent an arrow through it, and that it had uttered no sound, but had melted away into the bracken.

Giffard had doubted these tales, but there was this grey, floating thing about a hundred yards ahead of him, and he touched his horse with the spurs to get a nearer view of it.

The soft turf deadened the sound of his horse's hoofs, and he had cantered some fifty yards before he saw the grey shape turn sharply and pass behind the bole of a great beech tree. Giffard dismounted and, leaving

his horse in the ride, went wading through the bracken with one hand on the short sword that he wore. His eyes had marked the trunk of the beech tree from the moment he had seen the unknown thing disappear behind it.

He halted about twenty paces from the tree, conscious that the dusk was falling and that he had no doubt at all that such things as ghosts existed.

"Hallo, there, hallo!"

No one answered him and nothing moved.

He went on another five paces, moving to one side so as to see round the tree.

Suddenly he stopped dead, for the thin, clear note of a bell broke the vast silence of the forest, and a voice uttered a muffled cry of "Beware, beware!"

Giffard crossed himself. The thing behind the tree was a leper.

He went no nearer, but spoke from where he stood.

"Come out into the open, my friend. There is no cause to hide behind that tree."

The thing came out where he could see it, all muffled up in a grey habit, the cowl drawn forward, the leper bell hanging by a strap from its girdle. The face under the cowl was swathed in linen, and nothing but two eyes showed.

Pity stirred in Giffard's heart. Even the repulsiveness of this outcast made his loneliness seem more terrible and tragic. What must life mean to such a creature as this? And perhaps he thanked God for his own youth, for his own clean brown skin, and for the right to look unabashed into the eyes of a man or a maid.

"Peace to you, brother. Why do you wander here—in the forest?"

A thin, smothered voice answered him—

"Where should such as I wander?"

Handwritten signature

What does it avail? The birds do not cease singing because a leper is in the wood."

"True, true. But I am the master-forester, my friend, and all those who pass here are under my ken."

"I shall not harm the deer, good sir."

"But my men have come near harming you. To be taken for a ghost may tempt some fool to shoot. I would bid you to make more use of that bell you carry."

"I will ring more often, good sir, and yet, if one of your foresters gave me death, I doubt whether I should grieve."

He seemed to have no more to say, but stood there mutely in the dusk, his hands hidden in the sleeves of his habit.

"How do you come by food here?"

The leper hesitated.

"There is an old woman who keeps a cow and a few pigs on the other side of the forest. She sells me milk and bacon and bread. Do not be angry with her, lording. We do not go near one another. She puts the food under a bush, and I go and take it, and leave money."

"And where do you sleep?"

"In the bracken. I am used to the open sky and the dew. And at night I look at the stars. They are the eyes of heaven, and they do not fear to look upon me."

Giffard would have questioned him further, but his horse was growing restless, and he feared the beast might bolt.

"If at any time you are hungry, friend, come to the Great Lodge, and you shall be fed. And may God and our Lady comfort you!"

The leper bowed his head and murmured words that Giffard could not hear. He went back through the bracken, mounted his horse, and rode on down White Hart Walk, leaving the leper standing under the beech tree.

"Poor soul!" he thought. "Surely this is no warm, blithe world to him, but a land of shadows where Death walks as a friend."

Giffard was hardly out of sight, when the leper went on at a rapid pace through the beech wood, holding the bell clapper so that it made no sound. The grey figure threaded the glooms of the outer woods, and, coming to the meadow-lands, stood at gaze, its face turned towards Fulk de Corbil's great castle. And suddenly it broke into a run, following a thorn hedge that parted two meadows.

Fulk de Corbil had been out hawking, and was riding back, as the dusk fell, with his boon companions and his servants. It was a garish company, gaudily coloured with its

slashed sleeves and liripiped hoods, its rich horse-trappings, and its laughter. A cadger walked behind Fulk de Corbil with six fine hawks on the frame. There were women mounted on palfreys, women with gay faces and gayer clothes. Twenty archers in red and green followed behind, for Fulk de Corbil was not loved in those parts, and the forest folk were not gentle.

As they came along the track round the dusky moat towards the bridge gate, Fulk de Corbil had a silver box of sweetmeats on the saddle before him. A gay lady rode on either side of him, and he was twitting them and laughing, holding out the box first to one and then to the other, but drawing it back when they reached out their hands.

"How the dear children have always quarrelled over me!" And he laughed, showing his teeth above his pointed red beard.

"Snatch! Snatch! My hawks are quicker!"

They mocked him in return, and their voices were hard and audacious.

"To be sure, you have always offered much and given nothing!"

"Master Reynard, Mortimer's fox!"

The last gibe stung him, and he turned his lean, fierce face on the woman who had uttered it.

"That tongue of yours is forked, Sancia. All the sweetmeats in this box would not sweeten it. Eloise here——"

A bell jangled suddenly, and they saw standing by the bridge house a grey figure with muffled face, one hand outstretched.

"Have pity, gentles, have pity!"

Fulk de Corbil had the soul of a brute, and Sancia's words angered him so that he cared not whom he hurt.

"What! A death's head! You rotting thing, who sent you here?"

The leper repeated his whine.

"Alms, lording! Have pity!"

Fulk de Corbil pushed his horse forward, raised the silver box, and threw it full in the leper's face.

"Take your breath away from my gate, you dog, or my fellows shall pin your rags to you!"

Then he turned on the woman who had taunted him.

"This rotten apple shall have your sweetmeats, Sancia! Thunder, but it is a pity that there is no cancer to eat out women's tongues!"

When Fulk de Corbil and all his company had ridden through the bridge gate and over the bridge into the castle, the leper stood

staring over the moat. Yellow lights were shining out here and there in the black mass, the rays from the loopholes and windows striking the water in the broad moat and making little glimmering trackways that dwindled into the darkness.

Suddenly the grey figure on the edge of the moat thrust out its arms towards Brent Castle in a frenzy of hate.

"Ah, Fulk de Corbil, wretch, traitor, betrayer of good men, beware! The hand that strikes shall have no pity!"

The leper picked up the silver box, emptied the last of the sweetmeats out of it, and hid it away in the wallet that hung at his back.

Three days passed, and John Giffard had warned his men. "Your ghost is nothing more than a poor leper. I spoke with him in White Hart Walk. He will do no harm now that the fence month is over."

There had been trouble in Dewlap Woods. Ragged rascals had broken in there and slain a deer, for Mat of the Moor had found a blood track and the slots of a deer, and a place where men had trampled the bracken. Giffard knew no such thing as fear, and, being the son of a mesne lord, he held that a gentleman should be first when hard knocks might be expected. The forest folk called him "John Strong-in-the-arm," and the women wondered why he did not marry. "No wench proud enough to match him," said some, "though my Lord Fitzpeter's daughter would not say him nay, if he asked her."

A full moon was up, and John Giffard put on a light shirt of ring mail under his green tunic, buckled on a short sword, took his bow and six arrows, and went out alone from the Great Lodge. He struck north by the King's Ride, and held for the Dewlap and Badger Woods, crossing Witch's Bog and going over Heron's Heath. But though he beat all the rides and ways on the north of the forest, he found no trouble there, and heard no sound save the night wind in the trees.

He passed two hours sitting under the Queen's Yew on the edge of the northern purliens, and just before dawn he started homewards, striking across Heron's Heath for the Black Vale. Now, the Black Vale was the wildest part of the forest, and there were but three living men who knew the paths and the ways. Giffard was one of them, and he entered the Black Vale about dawn.

It was filled with one huge wood of oaks, beeches, and yews, with here and there a

forest pool or a wild clearing. Giffard followed Gilimer Brook, a brown stream that ran through the Black Vale. He was near to Gilimer Pool, where the oldest yews in the forest grew, when he heard a sound that made him pause and listen.

There was no doubt as to the sound; it was the note of a bell, casual but half muffled, and it came from the direction of Gilimer Pool. He pushed on cautiously through the tall bracken, reached the yews, and stole through under their black branches.

Then he stood motionless and astonished, leaning on his bow. The yews shut in an open space, and in the centre lay the forest pool, with the dawn light striking through the tops of the yews and throwing golden gleams upon the brown water. And kneeling on a great flat stone at the edge of the pool was the leper Giffard had met in White Hart Walk, and from under the grey cowl hung a mass of red-brown hair.

The leper was a woman!

The cowl hid her face, but suddenly she tossed the cowl back and, leaning forward as she knelt, looked at herself in the water of the pool. Giffard had expected some hideous mask, some whitened, swollen thing, for once in his life he had seen a leper's face, and he had never forgotten it. But this was the face of a girl, fresh and pure as a May morning.

And that wonderful hair of hers hung down till it trailed in the water, and its golds and reds and bronzes were reflected therein as the sunlight caught it.

Giffard held his breath.

She straightened herself, put her hair back, and, stretching her arms wide, drew in deep breaths, as though glad to be free of all those swathings and to feel the sunlight on her face. Her beauty was not a mere thing of the senses. The dark eyes, set well apart, had a smoulder of passion in them. There were touches of scorn about her mouth and nostrils, a scorn that was fine and courageous. And the dusky splendour of her hair seemed to cast a glow upon her, making the white skin and the red lips and the dark eyes more magical.

Giffard hesitated. Then he walked out from under the yews into the morning sunlight.

She was up like a startled deer. He saw her search for something, and found himself covered by a crossbow that she had snatched up out of the grass.

"Come no nearer!"

He showed her his unstrung bow.

"Madame, you and I have met before."

Then she knew him, but she did not lower that crossbow of hers, and he could see her drawing her breath in quickly, like an animal that has been startled.

"Ah, John Giffard!"

For some seconds they stood thus, about fifteen paces apart, looking at each other with watchful eyes.

Suddenly she lowered her crossbow.

"Some men, like some dogs, must be trusted."

He smiled at the words.

"Madame, what shall I say to one caught breaking the forest laws? No one may carry a long bow or an arblast within the forest, save the King's forester and two such men as he shall name. Two nights ago a deer was slain."

She looked at him steadily.

"Deer! Think you I hunt the deer? No, that need not vex you."

"And these clothes and that leper bell?"

"I am afflicted. My face may seem fair—"

He disbelieved her utterly, and she saw that he disbelieved her.

"Maybe you speak not of the body, but of the heart?"

"A leper at heart! Thank you, John Giffard! Is it a leprous thing to hate someone because of a life that has been squandered? No. Neither can one leave certain things to God."

She seemed lost in thought for a moment, and her face looked whiter and more set towards some purpose. Then she raised her eyes to his, and, moving nearer through the bracken, scanned his face intently.

"John Giffard, I have heard it said that you are a strong man and a chivalrous. Your eyes look straight at me, nor do mine flinch from yours."

"Madame, I am what I am. What would you ask of me?"

Her face softened and a kind of radiance covered it.

"Believe what I tell you—that I have a certain vow upon me, that I am here for love of one who is dead. I will tell you my name; it is Judith Pendrell, and I have neither father, husband, brother, nor friend. I come not from these parts, but, because of this vow of mine, I hide myself in this forest. I ask you, John Giffard, not to put me forth."

She spoke very simply, almost like a child, but he judged that there was some

unforgettable thing hidden behind those eyes of hers. He was stirred within himself because of her, and that which was born within him was not mere pity.

"I shall not put you forth," he said, "and yet—"

She echoed him: "And yet?"

"The forest is not always merciful. There is a certain lord here, Fulk de Corbil, who holds the right of hunting the King's deer for three days each year. There is no king now but Roger Mortimer, and this Fulk de Corbil is his man. Well, he has chosen to hunt in the forest this day week, and he is a wanton, mischievous beast, and no cruel thing comes amiss to him."

She answered very quietly.

"I have heard of Fulk de Corbil. But why should he harm a leper?"

"Because there is no reason in a thing is reason enough for Fulk de Corbil. He would set his dogs on you if the whim took him. I would bid you lie hidden that day."

"That would be easy. Over yonder is a great oak with a hollow eaten out of its trunk. It would serve me as a castle."

He had one more question to ask her.

"Why do you carry that crossbow with you?"

"That is part of my vow. It is not for the deer; I swear that to you."

And he did not press her further.

"I trust you as to that. As for this disguise of yours—"

"It is a leper who walks the woods, John Giffard. Keep my secret. I, too, trust you with something."

She seemed to have said her say, and stood there waiting for him to go. Her eyes grew shy of his, for he was good to look upon, straight-lipped and clean, and she knew, as a woman knows, that the man in him had been stirred by the woman in her.

"Mistress Judith, we shall meet again."

"Perhaps—perhaps not. Whatever befalls, I thank you, Master Giffard."

A strong man may go for years without the great adventure of life befalling him. He may have cantered through his boyish escapades, gone love-sick for a week, or passed some face that seemed fair to him and then forgotten it. But when the real flare comes, it is fire of another sort, and the bigger the man's heart, the bigger the furnace.

So it befell with John Giffard. Gilmer Pool, with its brown woodland water, became a lure to him, and he saw it agleam



"He struck up Fulk de Corbil's sword and caught him by the throat."

with the glory of a woman's hair. Whence had she come? What was this mysterious vow of hers? What shadowy sorrow lay hid in the depths of her eyes?

The deer had no lord those days. The forest held a thing that was more wonderful, more to be desired. John Giffard would be out before dawn, following the brown glimmer of the Gilimer Brook where it ran under the oaks and beeches of the Black Vale. He was an unseen warden, an invisible pilgrim, for his love was a watching and a great silence. He never showed himself to Judith Pendrell, but he was there along the yews, seeing but unseen.

And here almost daily he saw a strange thing. There was a tall beech tree at one end of the glade, and Judith would take her crossbow and shoot bolt after bolt across the pool at the grey trunk of this beech tree. The intent, purposeful thoroughness of her shooting was unforgettable. When she had shot some dozen bolts, she would walk round the pool to the beech tree, examine the trunk and the hits that she had made. Very few shots went astray; she was in dead earnest about something, and her shooting with the crossbow kept pace with her purpose. He would watch her spending an hour working the bolts out of the bark of the beech tree with her knife.

"This is not done for pleasure," he said to himself.

The mystery took on a new meaning.

Giffard had watched and held aloof, but, on the day before Fulk de Corbil's hunting, he showed himself by Gilimer Pool. Judith was sitting on a pile of bracken that she had cut, staring at the water of the pool like one who sees ghosts. Her cowl was over her head, but her face was uncovered.

Giffard had warned her that it was he who was moving through the yews.

"Mistress Judith, a friend!"

It was no mere fancy of his that her eyes were glad of his coming. She had been alone so much, with nothing but her own thoughts to brood over, that she was hungry for the sight of a human face, and perhaps her loneliness and the sinister days that lay before her made her yearn for the things that she had cast away out of her life.

Giffard came through the bracken towards her, and her very first glimpse of his face was a revelation. She looked at him, not a little astonished within herself, for in a week this man had changed from a mere stranger into a lover, without having seen her again,

as she thought, since he had surprised her by the pool.

"Still here?"

He stood looking down at her, and his eyes made her afraid because they beckoned her away from the fate that she had chosen.

"Yes, I am still here."

He threw himself down a bow's length from her, propping himself on one elbow.

"I came to tell you that Fulk de Corbil hunts to-morrow."

She had to stiffen herself against a self-betrayal, for that name was like the cut of a whip to her.

"I will shut myself in my castle."

"There is the Great Lodge. You will be safer there."

"You forget what I pretend to be."

"There is a shed built of faggots in my orchard. A leper would do no harm there."

Persuade her he could not; there was always the mystery of that vow. And in his desire to persuade her, the lover in him broke loose, almost without his realising it; but Judith knew it, and his love made her afraid. For the faint echo in her own heart grew suddenly to a strangely pleading cry. Love and life held out their hands to her, and she had taught herself to look for death.

Yet, before he left her, this love of his became a conscious and rational thing that would not consent to be silenced.

"Am I to know nothing?"

Her eyes tried to rebuff him, and they failed.

"You have but to think of my bell and my leper's frock. They warn friends away."

"What danger is there?"

"That is a thing I may not tell you."

"But if I should vow to discover it?"

She turned to him with sudden passion.

"Man, man, is there no sanctuary for me even here? Say no more, I charge you, or I shall hate you from the depths of my heart!"

When he left her that day, his love was the greater because of her striving to escape it. So great was it that he could forgive her her silence, and swear to himself that she should learn to trust him even with the truth.

Giffard was nearer to it than he guessed.

The forest was to be Fulk de Corbil's for one whole day, and Giffard forgot the deer in thinking of Judith Pendrell. He was down among the yews by Gilimer Pool soon after dawn, and the first sound that he heard was the sound of the leper bell.

He hid himself, and the sound of the bell came nearer, passed him, and went on, as though Judith were following the Gilimer Brook. She was walking right away from the hollow oak that was to have served her as her castle, and he was puzzled to know why she was astir so early, and, being puzzled, he followed her.

He soon sighted the grey figure moving among the trees, and he kept Judith in view, shadowing her through the forest, and wondering as he went. For she took the Gilimer Brook as her guide, and the brook would lead her through the Black Vale, across White Hart Walk to High Woods and Bratley Heath, where Fulk de Corbil would begin his hunting. They would start a stag in High Woods and hunt him across Bratley Heath, for Mat of the Moor was to serve Fulk de Corbil for the day, and the course of Bratley Heath was Mat's favorite chase.

An hour later John Giffard was lying full length in the bracken, watching Judith, who had posted herself behind the trunk of a beech tree. The green gloom of the woods ended before them in a great sunlit glade, whose southern end showed the blue horizon over Bratley Heath. Giffard kept very still. He had seen Judith take the stock and the bow of her crossbow from under her grey habit, fit them together, and take a trial shot at a tree on the far side of the glade. He was astonished, too, at the place she had chosen, for only a forester's cunning could have told her that a stag nearly always took his course along this glade when hunted over Bratley Heath.

What was in her mind? Was this a mere piece of adventure, or had that bow of hers some grim purpose to serve?

From the distance came the tongueing of dogs. The sound drew nearer and nearer, and Giffard's eyes never left Judith's figure. He had brought his own bow with him, and he strung it, ready. There was the sound of some big thing galloping, and Giffard saw a hart royal come up the glade and pass the tree where Judith lay hidden. She let the hart go by and loosed no bolt at it.

Giffard rose to his knees. If she had let the hart go by, was she waiting for the man who hunted it?

The hounds appeared, running in a bunch, with a fierce old dog leading them. They passed, and the noise of their padding feet was followed by the galloping of a horse. Giffard knew Fulk de Corbil's ways. He was a mad rider, and the cronies of his who

hunted with him were content to be left behind.

Giffard saw Judith move from behind the trunk of the tree. A big roan horse was coming along at a gallop, and the man who rode it was Fulk de Corbil. His green surcoat was embroidered with crimson falcons, and his hunting cap was of crimson velvet. A silver horn was slung over one shoulder, and he carried a bow in his right hand.

Giffard sprang up. He heard the burr of a bowstring, and saw Fulk de Corbil sway in the saddle; but he recovered himself, reined his horse in, and threw rapid glances into the wood.

Judith was rebending her bow. She went forward into the open, laid a bolt on the string, and took a steady aim at the man on the roan horse.

The second bolt struck him full in the flank, but Fulk de Corbil had a chain mail shirt under his surcoat. He sighted Judith, stuck the spurs into his horse, and rode straight at her, throwing his bow aside and drawing the short sword that he wore.

Giffard saw her stand stock still, as though astonished that both her bolts had failed. She did not try to re-string her bow, but seemed to wait there helplessly for Fulk de Corbil's horse to trample on her.

Giffard shouted—

"Run—run!"

She heard him, and the will to live seemed to revive in her. She turned and fled back into the wood; but Fulk de Corbil rode in after her, for the great trees stood well apart, like the pillars of a church:

Giffard was fitting an arrow to his bow. Fulk de Corbil's rage had galloped by without seeing him, and he cursed as he rode.

Giffard saw Judith stumble and fall. Fulk de Corbil was about to ride right over her, when Giffard sent an arrow into the horse's shoulder. The horse swerved, reared, and pitched Fulk de Corbil out of the saddle.

He was unhurt, and had kept his grip of the short sword. Judith had scrambled to her feet, but Fulk de Corbil was too quick for her. His fury centred itself on the figure in grey, and he caught her by the hood, dragging it back as she tried to escape.

Giffard was running through the bracken. He had thrown down his bow and drawn his short sword. He saw Fulk de Corbil's blade raised, heard him give a strange cry, and stand holding the leper by the hood. The mask of linen had slipped from Judith's

face. She had twisted herself round, and her eyes met Fulk de Corbil's eyes.

"Traitor, murderer, strike!"

"Judith Pendrell! You she-cat!"

"Strike! But for that mail shirt of yours, I should have been revenged!"

A dozen galloping horses went up the glade, but their riders saw nothing of what was happening in the wood, for the glade curved to the west, and they believed Fulk de Corbil to be ahead of them.

"You she-devil!"

He twisted one hand into her hair, held her at arm's length, and pointed his sword. But John Giffard was on him. He struck up Fulk de Corbil's sword and caught him by the throat.

"Loose your hold!"

Giffard flung him back, but Fulk de Corbil was a wild beast when his rage was up. Judith had slipped away, but he rushed round Giffard and sprang after her, and aimed a blow at her with his sword. It missed, but that blow turned Giffard into a madman.

In a minute Fulk de Corbil lay dead at his feet, and he and Judith were staring at the dead man and at each other.

Then she flung out her hands and spoke in a strange, awed voice.

"What have you done, what have you done, for my sake? This man was Roger Mortimer's creature, and Mortimer will not spare you."

She stood rigid, staring at the dead man.

"Of course, of course"—and her eyes flashed—"it was I who slew him, John Giffard, and I shall say that it was I who slew him. No one need ever know. I came here to slay him, because he betrayed my father—betrayed him to his death. You see, it was really I who slew him. I shall swear that!"

Giffard looked at her steadily.

"Now I know the truth. But, by my soul, you shall swear nothing of the kind! This is in my hands."

He took Fulk de Corbil by the heels, dragged the body further into the wood, and left it lying in the tall bracken. The dead man's sword and bow he thrust into a hollow tree. Fulk de Corbil's horse had stopped, and, standing at the edge of the glade, was turning its head and trying to lick the place where Giffard's arrow had wounded it in the shoulder.

Giffard went towards the horse, calling him softly.

"Poor fellow, poor old fellow!"

The horse consented to accept him as a friend. The arrow had struck slantwise and had not gone deep. Giffard plucked it out with one jerk of the hand.

"Softly, softly, old fellow!"

The horse started, stood quivering, but did not break away.

"Gallop home now, my friend. They can make what they can of the riddle."

He walked back to Judith, and she saw by his eyes that no words of hers would move him.

"Come!"

She did not move.

"Shall I give myself up?"

He caught her by the wrist, and his eyes looked into hers.

"Speak a word to anyone, and I shall tell the truth—that it was I who killed Fulk de Corbil. For a week I have played the spy; I watched you shoot with that crossbow of yours, and I wondered."

Her wide eyes questioned him, and yet she knew why he had watched over her in the forest.

"My doom is my own doom, John Giffard. Why should I lay it on any man?"

"Because a man's love is strong enough to bear heavier things than that."

He still held her by the wrist, and they began to walk through the forest, John Giffard, alert and restless, stopping now and again to listen. Once they heard the distant note of a horn, but hart, hounds, and horsemen were lost in the depths of the Black Vale.

Judith was silent. She glanced at Giffard's face as he strode beside her; his grip on her wrist never relaxed.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked him.

"To the Great Lodge."

"Your home?"

"My home."

"And what then? Have I no choice?"

He let go of her wrist suddenly.

"Pardon! I had almost forgotten that."

She managed to smile at him.

"But I came here to slay a man."

"It was I who slew him for you. That dog should have been drowned at birth."

They walked on a while in silence. Her face had softened; a kind of yearning look came into her eyes. She glanced at John Giffard, and all her loneliness cried out to him.

"John!"

He turned his head sharply.

"If I come, I shall bring you danger, perhaps sorrow."

"I am strong enough to put them out of my own house."

They walked on again in silence. Then he began to speak.

"Never had I set eyes on the mate I desired till I saw you by Gilmer Pool. Who knows the why and the wherefore? If you had had blood on your hands to-day, I should have loved you just the same. You are coming back with me to the Great Lodge. I shall shut the door and keep Death out."

Her hand came into his.

"I can hardly believe it," she said, "I, who thought life was just winter coming."

His arm went about her, but before they had gone very far, he made her stop while he cut the strap of the leper bell and threw it away into a thicket.

"Let that bide behind," he said. "There will be tongues enough to be kept quiet."

As for Fulk de Corbil, he lay there in the bracken, and after a few days no one

concerned themselves to search for him, for news came that the young King's men had seized Mortimer and Queen Isabella at Nottingham, and all Fulk de Corbil's creatures took fright and fled over the sea.

Nor is it on record that Fulk de Corbil was ever found. The forest folk believed that someone had slain him in the forest, and they had hated him enough to let well alone.

But they spun many tales about John Giffard and his lady. Some said she was a lord's daughter who had fled away disguised as a leper, because some lord would have married her by force, and John Giffard had caught his mate.

Mat of the Moor would roll his head from side to side and cross himself when he told how he had once shot an arrow at John Giffard's lady, taking her for a ghost.

"Never ghost had such fine children," he would say.

And the whole forest agreed with him.



AD FINEM.

THERE are three things I shall ever keep,
Though all else I lose to heartless Time.
I shall keep, until the last long sleep,
Soul attuned to Spring's exulting rhyme.

Though old age shall make me sad and slow,
Take the fancies that my youth beguiled,
Still my heart with love shall warm, I know,
When I see a helpless little child.

And though my old eyes shall lose the sight
Of the far dim hills and sweet blue skies,
Still my heart shall thrill, my face alight,
At the warm glow in a maiden's eyes.

GEORGE LAWRENCE ANDREWS.

Tiphaine la Fée

BY WARWICK DEEPING

YOUNG Bertrand du Guesclin came from the woods about sunset, and saw the valley, called in those parts the Valley of the Black Mere, spreading before him like a green robe dusted with precious stones. He had ridden through the woods and over the wild moors all day from Rennes towards Gleaquin by the sea. His mail glistened in the slant rays of the sun as he scanned the valley for some abbey or house where he might crave food and lodging for the night. Bertrand was hot and weary, nor had he broken bread since noon. His red, raw-boned horse chafed under the saddle and went heavily, with dropped muzzle and unpricked ears.

Near by, on the edge of the wood, Bertrand saw a peasant cocking hay in a little hollow under the brow of the hill. He shouldered his spear, gave his weary nag the spur, and trotted down over the wild grass-land painted thick with flowers. The peasant stood up and eyed the armed man keenly, for the English robbers had made the shimmer of steel terrible in the Breton lands. Bertrand shouted to him cheerily enough, with his spear poised upon his thigh.

"Hi! Jean—Pierre—bonhomme, I want a lodging for the night."

The man, leaning on his fork, recognized the du Guesclin arms—a shield argent with a displayed eagle beaked and membered gules.

"There is the Black Tower in the mere, messire," he said; "it is the Vicomte de Bellière's. He is of your party."

Bertrand, following the man's gesture, saw the black battlements of a tower rising from a mist of green. He threw the man a piece of silver and rode on, his casque hanging at his saddle-bow, his dark-skinned, ugly face shining against the western sun. It was three days since he had stolen his father's arms and ridden in to Rennes to the tourney there. Now, with the skin wound he had gotten him at the tourney burning and twinging

under his bloody shirt, he was riding for Gleaquin to throw himself and his trophy at his mother's feet. Proud Jeanne might smile at the escapade, since her ugly son had beaten the best Breton knights in the lists at Rennes.

The Black Tower rose above a cloud of aspen-trees, with its rugged battlements gilded by the splendor of the setting sun. Bertrand slouched awkwardly in the saddle, his green eyes sparkling in his boyish yet rugged face. Though he knew not the place, it was his purpose to seek lodging there, to have his wound dressed by fair dame's hands, to rest and eat before he rode on the morrow for the sea.

The shivering chatter of the aspens met him as he came over the meadows towards the castle. A thousand tall trees flickered their flakes of silver in the wind; a thousand straight trunks dwindled column on column into mysterious aisles of light. The grass, green and vivid, was plashed by a myriad frettings through of gold. The thickets were full of movement and of sound, merged and musical murmurings like the plash of a cascade or the beating of innumerable wings.

Bertrand's rough face flushed at the sound, his eyes glistened. Mystery was here, and more than mystery. The tall trees seemed to chant and mutter to him strange and wizard prophecies. Had not Merlin spoken of old that an eagle should fly out of Brittany towards the south and draw a multitude of starlings after him? Swords should shine, trumpets scream, spears bristle against the blue. There was the breath of romance in these muttering trees, these myriad silver tongues afire with the glamour of the west.

Betwixt the straight trunks at last and over the green grass the Black Tower loomed like a great shadow in the midst of a wood. Bertrand could see that it was set on an island in a mere, with yellow flags he had known at Gleaquin grow-

ing thickly in the shallows. The water was very black about the tower, yet shredded and slashed with the sunlight sifting through the trees.

Bertrand rode down and halted, seeing that the bridge with its painted panels was broken in the midst, while some rough planking had been thrust across the gap. The chains of the drawbridge were snapped, the gate half open, the portcullis propped up by a beam. To the right of the tower, Bertrand could see the tall windows and the louvre of the hall. To the left, palisades closed in what seemed to be a garden.

There was some mystery here, something that seemed to prophesy of violence and of wrong. *Sieur Robert's* son rolled out of the saddle, tethered his horse to a tree, and thrust his spear into the grass. He put his shield forward on his left arm and bared his sword, greedy of adventure, like the great boy he was. He crossed the bridge cautiously, scanning the loops and windows of the tower. Once he thought he heard the sound of voices, a vague muttering more like the sound of the wind in the aspens beyond the mere. Peering round the edge of the half-opened gate, Bertrand came plump upon the body of a man lying prone across the guard-room door. A pool of half-clotted blood showed amid the grass and weeds. Near him was stretched the body of a dead hound thrust through with a spear.

Bertrand was stooping over the fallen man, when a loud laugh came peeling from the direction of the hall. Several rough voices were chattering in chorus, with the shrill tones of a woman's voice piercing the chant. Bertrand, starting aside to where the newel staircase of the tower ascended in the thickness of the wall, climbed it step by step, stopping often to listen like a weasel in a hole.

He came first to the room above the vaulting of the gate. A mullioned window, with the wooden shutters propped open, and cushioned seats in the jambs, looked out upon the court and garden. Opposite the window was a door that led to the cell where the portcullis winches were. The room looked like the chamber of a clerk, the table littered with scrolls, books, and curious instruments, an astrolabe, tablets of wax, things that were foreign and grotesque to Bertrand's un-

lettered soul. There was an open ambry in the wall, full of jars and caskets, glass vials, and bundles of dried herbs. Near the window stood a brazier with a bronze bowl steaming thereon, faint perfumes floating with the vapors about the room. The stone floor was strawed with flowers and rushes, and a woman's cloak hung over a carved chair by the table.

Bertrand, finding no life therein, turned back and entered the narrow passage that led to the oriel above the hall. Again the loud, rough voice, full of a neighing insolence, came up to him out of the unexplored darkness of the place. Bertrand strode into the oriel with his shield up, glaring round him rapidly as though ready for devils and for men. A great bed stood in one corner. In the midst of the floor lay a naked poniard that looked as though it had been smitten out of some desperate hand. The door opening upon the stairway leading into the great hall was ajar.

Suddenly a woman's voice sounded out in the silence of the place:

"By God and the good saints, sirs, have a care how ye tempt my brother's vengeance."

No retort came for the moment.

"Dom Etienne, madame," said the harsh, jerky voice, "shall prove anon whether you are a witch or no. Have we not caught you stewing poison for the Lord of Dol? There are waxen images hid away somewhere, I'll wager. My lord has had a running wound in the neck for weeks."

"You fools. I am innocent as a child. Nay, this is but a trick. You are of the English party. Is it manly to put bonds upon a woman?"

"Is not the name of Montfort noble enough? We have bound you with a blessed rope, madame. Had not the good Abbot crossed it with holy water, you would be up the chimney in a cloud of smoke."

There was a narrow glazed window in the oriel looking down into the hall. Bertrand, his eyes sparkling, crept to it and peered down into the great chamber beneath. The waning sunlight streamed in through the unshuttered windows, struggling with the gloom that lurked amid the beams and rafters of the high-pitched roof. There were four armed men in the

hall beneath—three of them seated on the benches, the fourth perched upon the end of the long table, with a drawn sword across his knees. Bertrand knew him for the Bastard of Auray, as big a ruffian as ever sold his loyalty for gold. In a great chair below the dais sat a woman, bound there hand and foot, her tawny hair half fallen from its golden caul. Her back was towards Bertrand, but it seemed to him that she was young and fair.

The man with the sword across his knees glanced round suddenly, as though marking that it was growing dark.

"Geffroi, the torches. *Sieur Richard* the Abbot should be here anon. Madame, I trust we shall not keep you waiting long for the ordeal."

"I can wait, messire, in patience," she said; "yet I would crave from you the loosing of these cords."

The Bastard slipped down from the table and went so close to her that his pointed beard was well-nigh in her face. His dark eyes shone out from under the curve of his bassinet.

"Favors go with favors," Bertrand heard him say.

"I am in no plight to bargain with you, messire," said the woman.

"You are a pretty witch, madame, though a witch and a poisoner."

"I am neither a witch nor a poisoner. Ah,—hold off, messire; am I to be treated like a baggage wench?"

Bertrand, with his jaw set, turned suddenly, and stood in the oriel, thinking. Well, it was a boy's madness, but he could not see a woman bullied. These were some of Montfort's gentry, the friends of England, hateful the more to true Bretons and to France. Should he go down by the stairway into the hall, or descend to the court and charge in by the great door?

He chose the latter strategy, and, descending the tower stair, came down into the darkening court. Four horses were standing by the steps of the kitchen, and a dark blot on the stones showed where another man had fallen. Bertrand, stealing along under the windows of the hall, came to the arched doorway, and peered in by the crevice left by the clumsy hinging. He heard the woman pleading with the Bastard of Auray, but he could

not see what was passing at the dais end of the hall.

Bertrand, putting his shield forward, burst in with a shout that set the rafters ringing. "A rescue, a rescue, *Notre Dame de Guesclin*." In his terrible verve and swiftness lay the Breton's strength. He cut down the man who was setting torches in the brackets along the wall, and sprang forward on the two other men-at-arms who were drinking at the long table. Taken by surprise, one fell stabbed in the throat as he was starting from the bench, while the other sought to grapple Bertrand—a grim opening for the youth, who had thrown all the best wrestlers in Brittany. Bertrand tripped up the man's heels, and found a weak joint in his harness as he rolled upon the floor.

It had all happened in the taking of twenty breaths, so swift and cunning had been du Guesclin's coming. The Bastard of Auray had drawn back from the woman's chair, amazed to see how his men went down before this short, sturdy youth in the black harness. He caught up his own sword as the last man fell, and came striding down the hall, his black beard bristling, his dark eyes aflame. He read the device on Bertrand's shield by the glare of the single torch that burnt upon the wall.

"Guard, boy, guard—"

Bertrand's eyes flashed.

"Lay on, Bastard," he said. "See, here, I fight in my father's arms. The Guesclin eagle shall whet his talons."

"I will wring your neck, you little ermine."

"Less froth, Bastard, more blows."

Bertrand cast his shield aside so as to have the other at no advantage. They circled round each other, foining, and footing it warily over the flagged floor. A brisk exchange of blows left the Bastard of Auray with a broad gash athwart the nose and forehead. He cursed, shook the red blood out of his eyes, and rushed in, snarling, with his sword leaping from side to side. Bertrand, giving back and biding his time, beat up the Bastard's blade of a sudden, and springing in, smote him with his fist full in the face. As the man staggered, he swung his sword for the joints of the gorget. The Bastard of Auray gave a hoarse cry, and tottered forward upon his knees. A second swing



Painted by Elizabeth Shippen Green

SHE WAS LYING BACK, WATCHING HIM, IN THE GREAT CHAIR

of the Breton's sword-gave the gentleman his quittance.

Bertrand, his nostrils dilating and his eyes afire, glanced round at the fallen men, and turned for the first time towards the lady. She was lying back watching him, in the great chair, her hands bound to the arms thereof, and her feet knotted together at the ankles. She was very pale under her tawny hair, her large hazel eyes shining like elf's eyes out of her oval face. Bertrand stood looking at her with a sense of awkwardness about the knees; he was not a dame's man, and his ugly face had won him more frowns than favors from the women.

"Madame," he said bluntly, resting his hands on the pommel of his sword, "I know not who you are, only that the Vicomte de Bellière is lord of this castle. I rode hither for a night's lodging, and to earn my welcome I have had to rob these knaves of life."

She did not smile at him, but appeared cowed and frightened for the moment by the wild blood-spilling that had passed before her eyes.

"I am beholden to you, Messire Bertrand," she began—

"Ha—"

"I know you, messire, though you bear your father's shield. Quick, ^{and} you would save me, cut these cords and let me go. The Bastard of Auray surprised us while my brother was tourneying at Rennes. There were but three men in the tower. And now, messire, the Lord of Dol and the Abbot Etienne are pricking here to have my blood. They say I am a witch and have cast spells over the captains of the Montfort party. It is false, Messire Bertrand. True, I can tell the stars and gaze into crystals, but my wise lore is innocent as these men were evil."

She spoke hurriedly, breathlessly, as though under the influence of fear. Her great eyes pleaded with Bertrand like the eyes of some wild thing. He whipped out his poniard forthwith, and cut the cords with a quick turn of the wrist.

"Why, you are but a child," he said, bluntly, looking in her face, "and though I saw many books above, I doubt your skill to cast a horoscope."

She started up with a muttering thanksgiving to several saints when he

had freed her, and, as in a sudden access of joy, bent and kissed him on the lips. She was taller than Bertrand, and very fair to look upon, with her slim but sensuous figure, her warm eyes and tawny hair. A sudden color had spread into her cheeks. She smoothed her green gown with her slim hands, and tightened up the buckle of her silver girdle.

"Messire Bertrand," she said, blushing, "I am Epiphanie Ragueuel, sister to the Vicomte de Bellière. By some I am called Tiphaïne la Fée, because I am skilled in astrology and the gathering of herbs. But that there is no black witchcraft in me I will take oath on the cross of your sword."

Bertrand, ugly youth, was looking at her with unfeigned delight. She was wondrous fair and elfinlike, swift and brilliant about the eyes.

"By St. Klado!" he said, bluntly, "you have white witchcraft perhaps. I will take any man by the beard who gives you the black."

She smiled at him, then went white and serious of a sudden, as though remembering the peril that threatened her that night.

"Messire Bertrand, let us go. You have a horse—?"

"Over the bridge, and the Bastard has left us four."

Her eyes darkened, and she drew to Bertrand's side.

"They will slay us both if they find us here. Ah, how your man bleeds! Is he dead, Messire Bertrand? Ah, horrible! he spoke and jested but a moment ago."

They passed out together through the darkening hall, with the single torch flaring upon the wall. Bertrand picked up the dropped shield, and coming out into the court, moved towards the four horses tethered by the kitchen. He had chosen one for his lady, and had taken the beast by the bridle, when a distant trumpet-cry, repeated thrice, sounded out across the valley. Bertrand stopped short, and turned to look at Tiphaïne with a frown upon his face.

"It is the Lord of Dol," she said.

"They are in the aspen wood—"

"Messire Bertrand, we are caught in a trap."

"Wait," he answered her; "there may yet be time."

He ran across the court to the gateway under the tower, and looked out over the mere to the aspen wood, sombre in the deepening dusk. He saw the glitter of harness amid the trees, heard the muffled thunder of horses trampling in the grass. Clapping to the gate, he shot the bolts and pinned up the bar. Then, throwing down the beam that propped up the portcullis, he climbed the tower stairway to the cell above the gate, and let the great grid go clattering to the ground.

There were a couple of squints in the cell commanding the bridge and giving view to the wood beyond. Bertrand, looking out at the armed men gathering beyond the mere, heard a light step in the room behind him and the rustling of a woman's gown. He felt Tiphaine near to him even before she had entered the portcullis cell. There was a strange look in her large eyes, a wistful sadness about her mouth.

"Messire Bertrand," she said, solemnly.

The man held up a hand and pointed significantly to one of the loops. Tiphaine understood the gesture, but standing at her full height looked Bertrand frankly in the eyes.

"I am remembering that you are young," she said. "Forgive me, messire; I would not have you be as the men in yonder hall for my sake."

Bertrand frowned and hung his head.

"My quarrel is not your quarrel," she said; "your blood must not be wasted for mine. If I have seemed selfish, messire, forgive me. Since I am innocent, I fear not what my enemies may do unto me. Go, messire, and may God go with you."

Bertrand stared at her in mute astonishment for the moment. Even in the dusk he could see that she was shuddering with the fear of violence and death hovering above her soul. And yet her brave tongue was for bidding him play the coward lest he should suffer for her sake.

"Madame," he said, with a certain blunt dignity, "the ways of chivalry are not ordered so."

"Ah, messire, since we cannot both escape, I pray you strip off your armor and swim the mere. There is a wicket in the garden wall. You can trick them in the dark."

Bertrand's ugly face betrayed his extreme contempt for the suggestion. It was noble of her to wish it, but, by St. Klado, it would be a queer thing to see a du Guesclin running away naked and leaving a woman to be tortured in her own home.

"By your courtesy, madame," he said, "I refuse to budge a foot from you."

"Messire Bertrand," she answered, sharply, yet with a ring of gladness in her voice.

"I am young, madame, ha! and therefore the more supple. The Lord of Dol is at your gate. He and his men would drown you for a witch! Good. They shall not come at you save over my body."

"What will you do?" she asked, with her hands over her bosom.

"Do?" he growled, as though such a question were in truth a woman's. "What should a man do when he has a good sword and a strong arm?"

He turned from her suddenly and peered out again across the water, where the Lord of Dol and the Abbot Etienne were whispering together under the trees. They had ten spears with them—that is to say, some thirty men, well armed and harnessed. Bertrand guessed that they had found his horse, and were wondering what had befallen the Bastard of Auray. The closed gates and the silent tower gave them meat for meditation.

A squire dismounted, and taking his orders from the Lord of Dol, crossed the bridge towards the gate. He blew a blast upon his bugle-horn. Bertrand, setting a hand on Tiphaine's shoulder, looked in her face and smiled grimly.

"Stay here, madame," he said.

"But—"

"Hist! they know nothing; they are in the dark. The Bastard and his men are silent. I will go down and parley."

"I trust you, messire," she said.

"That is well," he answered, bowing down his head.

The bugle-horn blared a second time before the gate. Bertrand, hurrying down the stair, gave a glance at the dead man by the wall, and went towards the grill. It was too dark now for the herald to see aught within, or to realize the defenceless nature of the place.

"Who's there?" he shouted, his gruff voice echoing under the vaulted arch.

"Sieur Robert du Guesclin and his company."

Bertrand grimaced. The lie would have been fortunate had he not been the Sieur du Guesclin's son.

"What is his need, sir?"

"The Vicomte's courtesy, food and lodging for the night."

Bertrand pondered a moment, with his fist at his chin. The Sieur du Guesclin was at Rouen town, and therefore the lie fell strangely short of fooling those within. Hammering the dilemma in his mind, Bertrand closed the grill, turned suddenly towards the guard-room, and shouted as though to rouse the men within:

"Geoffroi, Jean, Prosper,—up, you dogs! What! dicing in the dusk, with no leisure to light a taper! Turn out the fellows from their quarters; send Jehan and three archers up to the battlements. The rest of you, run to arms in the court."

Therewith he sprang into the guard-room, heaved the table over the floor, swept a row of mugs from the shelf, upset a rack of arms, and swore nimbly to the same tune. Stamping to and fro several times betwixt the guard-room and the court, clattering with his sword, casting words into the air, now in a deep bass, now in a hoarse treble, he buoyed up the deceit with rare spirit. Picking up a broken piece of masonry, he hurled it at the horses, hallooing the while, so that the beasts broke and stampeded about the court. It was an honorable din for one man to make, and Bertrand clanged back to the gate, well satisfied.

With a broad grin, his strong teeth gleaming, he shouted lustily through the closed grill.

"Ha, messire, commend me to his Nobleness of Dol; give him the Vicomte de Bellière's good love and most holy blessing. And tell the Lord of Dol, messire, and the good Abbot Etienne that the Lady Tiphaïne sups at Dinant."

Bertrand heard the fellow curse a little as he sped back nimbly over the bridge. He opened the grill and watched the armed men under the trees. The esquire was standing by the Abbot's palfrey, frothing out his news as Bertrand had plotted it. Soon, without the bleat of a trumpet, the whole

troop turned tail, and disappeared amid the aspen-trees like so many frail ghosts.

Bertrand, his green eyes sparkling, watched from the grill a while, then climbed the stair to the chamber above the gate. He found the Lady Tiphaïne sitting white and silent in the window-seat, her rosary on her knees, the bowl on the brazier still smoking at her side. A single taper burned on the table. Tiphaïne started up on seeing him and held out her hands.

"Messire Bertrand—"

"We have fooled them," he said, laughing and flushing before her eyes.

"How? I heard much din and clamor; the castle might have been full of armed men."

Du Guesclin bent his head to hide the roguish smile still shining out on his rugged face.

"So thought the Lord of Dol and Dom Etienne," he answered. "I tricked their herald into believing that we had a garrison within. I ordered our men-at-arms about, sent one named Jehan with three crossbowmen up to the battlements, stampeded the horses, heard our Bretons run to arms. You see, madame, it was dark, and the fellow could see nothing. They have ridden off, swearing, doubtless, that the Bastard of Auray has played them false."

He spoke modestly enough, and yet with that grim gayety that made him in years to come the foremost captain of troubled France. As for the Lady Tiphaïne, she looked at him very kindly out of her wonderful eyes, till du Guesclin forgot that he was ugly.

"Messire Bertrand," she said, with her hands over her heart.

"My lady."

"You have saved my honor. By all the saints, messire, how can I thank you?"

Bertrand hung his great head and looked at her under his craggy brows.

"By not forgetting me, madame," he said.

Bertrand kept vigil in the tower all through the night, thinking of the Lady Tiphaïne, who had gone to her chamber and laid herself on the great bed. Du Guesclin had foraged for himself by torchlight in the kitchen, had stabled the Bastard's horses, and searched the men

in the great hall to see whether they were dead or no. One man still breathed, and Bertrand bound up his wound, laid him on a pile of straw, and trickled wine betwixt his lips. As for the Bastard and the others, they would ride no more over the Breton moors.

Bertrand passed the night in Tiphaine's chamber above the gate. He handled her books and tableta, marvelling much that one so fair should value wisdom that pertained only to graybeards and to priests. Bertrand thought much of the Lady Tiphaine that night. It pleased him to think that she had gone to her chamber trusting in him to guard her till the dawn. By St. Klado and all the good saints of Brittany, he would take an armful of spear-points into his bosom before any ruffian foot should cross her threshold.

When the east grew great with gold, he climbed to the battlements and scanned the valley for any sign of the Lord of Dol and his men. Save that his horse was missing, Bertrand could discover no trace of the witch-hunters who had threatened the Black Tower the night before. The Abbot Etienne had suspected the Bastard of treachery, and fearing an ambush in the woods, they had galloped for the north, and had not drawn rein till they were clear of the Vicomte's lands.

The Lady Tiphaine arose soon after dawn, combed and dressed her tawny hair, and put on her green gown embroidered with crimson lilies. She looked a wild and witchful creature enough as she went in search of Bertrand du Guesclin. There was a mysterious light in her warm brown eyes as she sought him in tower and court, and even in the great hall where the dead men lay. Turning at last into the garden where fruit-trees grew and many flowers dusted the grass, she saw Bertrand's arms and clothes lying on a knoll within the palisade. The wicket gate was open to the mere, and over the water she saw a great head and a pair of massive shoulders surging slowly towards the shore. Tiphaine watched him for a moment as he came breasting the sun-kissed water, glorying in his youth and strength. He was a man after a woman's heart in those violent and perilous days, grim, passion-

ate, loyal, generous to a fault. She slipped away as he neared the island, Bertrand catching sight of her green gown as she fled out by the garden gate.

Anon, after going into the little chapel beyond the hall to pray, the Lady Tiphaine came back to him with a rich color upon her face. Bertrand had put on his armor, and had cleansed his sword from the Bastard's blood. He looked hard at Tiphaine out of his keen, all-seeing eyes, as though eager to view her in the full light of day. Like a pure gem of maidenhood, she shone yet fairer in the morning sun, her hair glowing like tawny gold, her elf's eyes sparkling above her red and mischievous mouth.

"Greeting, Messire Bertrand," she said, going very near to him and looking steadily in his face; "the night has passed without a storm."

Young du Guesclin gazed at her as though his eyes boasted more eloquence than did his tongue.

"My brother should return to-day with the Lord of St. Lo. They were at Rennes for the tourney. I wonder—"

She hesitated, and looked at Bertrand solemnly under her long lashes. The Breton expanded his great chest and threw his head back on his powerful throat.

"I was at Rennes," he said, bluntly, "and saw how the day's honor went. Many fair dames smiled on us from the galleries, and yet the fairest was not there."

Tiphaine colored and opened her brown eyes wide.

"I was not at Rennes, Messire Bertrand," she said.

"Did I not say so, madame?"

She laughed, a peculiar flowing laugh, and began to pace the grass under the apple-trees. Bertrand, following her, strode at her side, his eyes searching out the beauties of her face and body with a species of boyish awe.

"I should have been at Rennes, Messire Bertrand," she said, "but for a promise—"

"A promise! And to whom, madame?"

"To the Lord of St. Lo. Strange, Bertrand, he thought me fair—ah! and sought me for his lady. I sent him to seek his pledge at Rennes."

Bertrand squared his shoulders and

looked fierce. It was his spear that had smitten the young Lord of St. Lo down into the dust. He would have smitten the fellow yet harder had he known Tiphaine then.

"And when he returns?" he asked, bluntly.

Tiphaine swept round, her gown gathered in her hand.

"Without the prize," she answered, "he will not return. Such was his vow to me. And, moreover, my crystals—my crystals, Messire Bertrand—did not promise him the garland."

Bertrand watched her, his ugly face bathed by the sunlight. Surely this girl with the tawny hair and the hazel eyes was the fairest flower in all the Breton lands?

"Madame Tiphaine," he said, "your crystals told you the truth."

She turned again, her green gown swinging in rich folds about her body, her golden head like a rare flower upon some slender stem.

"Ha! Messire Bertrand, you are wise, it seems."

"Was I not at Rennes?" he answered, stoutly. "See, here, the rent in my harness; 'twas given me by your lordling's spear."

She stretched out her white hand suddenly and touched his breastplate, as though to prove the truth of his words.

"And you, messire?" she asked, her eyes on his.

Bertrand, a little flustered, colored and hung his head.

"I had stolen my father's arms."

"Yes—"

"And, Madame Tiphaine, St. Klado smiled on me—"

"Ah—"

"The Vicomte your brother shall prove me when he returns."

She put her hands suddenly upon his shoulders and looked steadily in his face.

"Messire Bertrand," she said.

He gazed at her, his face kindling.

"I did not love the Lord of St. Lo. You overthrew him. Therefore I am your debtor."

Bertrand had been fumbling in the leather purse that hung at his belt. Flushing very red, he drew out a gold chain set with precious stones, the prize he had won at Rennes. He had promised it to the Lady Jeanne his mother, but fate and Madame Tiphaine willed it otherwise.

"Take it," he said, gruffly, going on one knee. "I won it fairly, and, St. Klado be blessed, the Lord of St. Lo could not bring it back from Rennes. And your pledge, Madame Tiphaine, will it serve for a spurless boy?"

She took the chain and fastened it about her neck. Then, stooping, she kissed Bertrand, looking long and steadily into his face.

"Enough, Bertrand of Brittany," she said; "the stars have marked you out to me of old. When you have fought one fight for our Breton lands, then—come to me. This chain shall be thy pledge."

Of Love

BY FRIDA SEMLER

THEY sing of love who never won his grace;
On harp and lute
They vaunt the glories of his dwelling-place.
They who are in his presence,—face to face
Are stricken mute.



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The Coward

A ROMANCE OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

By WARWICK DEEPING

ADAM GURDEN sat on an overturned tub in the great barn of Reydon Manor, and watched the first grey light of the dawn shiver in at the window slits and through the gaps about the clumsy door. Round him lay the vague shapes of men who had thrown themselves down to sleep the sleep of desperate weariness. They lay anyhow, jumbled together in grotesque confusion, some half propped against the walls, others resting one upon another so that they looked like dead bodies flung pell-mell into the barn. The air was full of the sound of their breathing.

Adam Gurden had not closed his eyes that night. He sat gnawing his knuckles, his face a patch of greyness in the dim light that began to fill the barn. Now and again he glanced right and left at the sleeping men as though he could have spat upon them for their gross, animal slumber. For Adam Gurden was not of the same tough, careless stuff. His thin face had a bleak yet feverish look, the look of a man who suffered. All through the night he had stared into the wild eyes of a thing called "fear," and the dawn found him shivering with a cold heart and icy hands.

If only he had not seen Roger slain in that skirmish yesterday! The horror of the thing haunted him—the body of his friend struck through below the ribs with the truncheon of a spear. And the affair of yesterday had been nothing but a skirmish. The bloodier business was to come, with two thousand Yorkists penned yonder by the Ludden River and the Sowerby Woods, and ready to fight like boars cornered and brought to bay.

Adam Gurden had not taken off his harness, save only his gauntlets and steel salade, that lay on the ground between his feet. The men who slept, slept in their armour. The faint grey light tingled on pieces of steel.

Somewhere out yonder a cock crowed—the first sound in a waking world. Adam Gurden threw up his chin and listened.

"Soon, the trumpets will sound—the trumpets will sound!"

The words went dinning through his head. He opened his mouth wide as though to draw in more air. Sweat broke out on his forehead. He drew his legs up under him, looked round at the sleeping men, and stooped to pick up his salade.

Leaving the gauntlets lying there, he rose and moved towards the door, holding his helmet in the hollow of his arm, and

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grasping the scabbard of his sword so that it should not strike against his greaves. Not a man stirred in the barn. Adam Gurden stepped over outstretched legs and sleeping faces, teeth clenched, breath coming and going through dilated nostrils. The door creaked as he pushed it open. His face was a pinched streak of fear in the half light of the dawn.

Then he stood in the great yard, and saw black gables rising steeply against a film of watery gold. Over yonder, in a rough waggon shed, horses were stabled, his own among them. He heard the beasts rubbing against one another, and making queer noises. No one stirred in the yard. Rain had fallen in the night, and the ground gleamed.

Adam Gurden remembered that he had tethered his horse where the waggon way went out between huge oak posts. It would be fairly easy to get the animal out without disturbing the others. He made his way into the shed, and his horse, standing awake there, rubbed his nose against his master's surcoat. Saddle and harness were on, and Adam's spear, with his shield slung to it, slanted against one of the tie-beams of the low roof. He helmed himself, unfastened his horse, took shield and spear, and leading the beast into the yard, mounted and rode out through the open gates.

A motionless figure leaning upon a spear, started into life against the eastern sky. It was one of My Lord Stugis' sentinels, who had been watching through the night with wide eyes turned towards the Yorkists sleeping over yonder. The man slanted his spear at Gurden's breast.

"Who stirs? The password!"

Adam's white heart leapt in him. He gave the password with cold lips.

"Bolingbroke. My Lord's orders!"

"Pass Bolingbroke. Whither away so early?"

"I carry orders. Geoffrey of Keynton should be with us. I was to ride south at dawn if he and his spears had not come in."

Adam's face flamed into sullen shame as he rode past the man and on down the wet and muddy road.

Five o'clock on a September morning, and before him lay stubbles that were all golden with the slanting light of the

rising sun. Westwards the purple steep of Sowerby Moor heaved to meet the forestland that stretched towards Wistbury and the sea. Adam Gurden turned his horse across the stubbles, and struck a sandy track that cut across the moorland. He rode fast, never pausing to look back, driven on by a dull and shameful fear. The faint and distant braying of trumpets drifted to him from Reydon Manor. He set his teeth and tried to scoff at the fools yonder who made all this bloody stir about the crowning of a king. Had he not his own lands to look to, his own life to live? Once beyond Wistbury he would have nothing to dread. The war had passed from those parts. The people were weary of it, and sat stolidly by their own hearths.

It was six of the clock when Adam Gurden left the moorland and touched the fringes of the forest. He knew that he would strike the road to Wistbury by bearing towards the west, and that he would have to be on the watch against running into Geoffrey of Keynton's men if they should be coming that way to join with my Lord of Stugis at Reydon. A rider could follow the road and keep hid among the trees.

Now Adam Gurden, like Balaam of old, was to find that the way he had chosen was not of God's choosing. He had sighted the Wistbury road, and had turned southwards into a glade that ran through a forest of firs, when he heard the sound of shouting and the noise of horses going at a gallop. He saw something white moving among the trunks of the fir trees far down the glade.

Adam reined in. The huge gloom of the forest added to the shadowiness of his courage, nor had he any desire to come face to face with any man until he was south of Wistbury town. He had half turned his horse towards the trees when a white palfrey dashed into the glade and came galloping towards him. The white palfrey carried a girl in a green cloak, with a tangle of red hair flying back over her shoulders. Some fifty yards behind her followed an armed man on a black horse. He was shouting as he galloped, and menacing the girl with the poised blade of a naked sword.

The girl bent over her palfrey's neck, and glanced back at her pursuer. It looked more than likely that she would outride him, for the beast under her had breed and metal, and the fellow who followed was a big man in heavy battle harness. They came galloping towards Adam Gurden, who sat his horse and stared like a man who sees stag and hounds whirl past him through the forest.

The girl was the first of the two to catch sight of the man in harness sitting his horse between the tall trunks of the firs. Adam Gurden was a man of some stature, and the sunlight, splashing upon him through the fir boughs, made him appear a mighty tower of steel. As for Adam, he saw the girl straighten in the saddle, shade her eyes with her hand, and open her mouth as though to cry out. Then he heard the man behind her shouting, and saw him point at her with his sword.

"Stop the wench!"

The adventure came on Gurden at the gallop, giving him no time to shirk it and stand aside. For the moment he was conscious of nothing but the face of the girl whom the white palfrey carried towards him.

Adam saw her lips move.

"Let me pass," she cried to him.

The man's shout followed on.

"Curses! Stop the wench!"

Nothing more singular than the mouth of a rabbit hole saved Adam Gurden from choosing his responsibility. The white palfrey put a right forefoot in the hole, and came down on his muzzle, throwing the girl well away into a clump of bracken.

Her pursuer pulled his horse up on its haunches, and Adam saw that the girl lay still. The white palfrey got up, and hobbled aside on three legs. Gurden and the man on the black horse found themselves staring at each other over the unconscious figure that lay amid the bracken. It should be someone's business to see if the girl's neck was broken, but Adam felt shy of the affair, and of this other gentleman who carried a naked sword.

They eyed each other through the squints of their helmets.

"God's mercy! This will save me some hard riding."

Adam sat in silence, with his spear slanted over his shoulder.

"Faith, sir, you make but little noise. And I see no token in your helmet."

"Is that your affair?"

The stranger swaggered a little.

"Am I afraid of the colour of my badge? See—the white rose here. Uncover, my friend—uncover!"

The fellow was a Yorkist, and this tangled the business further. Adam saw that he was a big man. It would be easier to lie than to quarrel.

"Sir," said he, "my honour chooses its own colour."

"Confound your honour! That's neither here nor yonder."

"A point to be argued!"

"Out with it—one way or t'other."

"You are too forward, sir. My concern is to know more of the girl here—in the bracken."

The man on the black horse showed an inclination to bluster.

"Say you so? Well, I have a spite against meddlesome people. I charge you—be cautious!"

"A man can be cautious when he knows his own courage."

"Courage! I have made many fools eat their own courage! Ride on, and take my blessing. I am very gentle with those who do as I desire."

They might have foined and fenced yet further with words, had not the girl sat up and stared at them, with a hand holding her forehead. Her dazed, dark eyes struck up at Adam Gurden with sudden flashes of appeal, and her white face and the red tangle of her hair threw his cowardice into confusion.

"Thrash this fellow, for me," said the eyes in the white face.

And Adam's heart answered:

"I would an I could. But maybe he would do the thrashing."

The knight on the black horse took the question into his own hands.

"Wench," said he, "get up, and come and stand at my stirrup!"

She remained seated amid the bracken.

"That I shall not—coward and traitor!"

"Be careful of that tongue, my lady. Sharp as it is, it is not so sharp as my sword here."

The girl looked at Adam Gurden, and the look made his heart leap in him. He turned to the man on the black horse.

"Look ye, sir; unless the lady be your wedded wife, she shall do as she pleases."

"Ha! Say you so?"

"She shall sit there in the bracken—if it pleases her."

"But I say that she shall come and stand at my stirrup."

"If she defies you, she shall defy you."

"I take no defiance from man or devil!"

"Take it or leave it, as you please."

The man on the black horse roared great words within his helmet. He put his shield forward with magnificent ostentation, and made his sword flash in the sunlight that splintered through the fir boughs. He walked his horse towards Adam, cursing him mightily, and swaggering in the saddle. The girl with the red hair scrambled aside to give these heroes room to fight.

Then Adam struck a most unknightly but sensible blow. He swung his long spear over from his shoulder, and the truncheon crashed like a young tree upon the black knight's helmet. He staggered in the saddle, his horse swerving away across the grass. And Adam Gurden, re-gathering his spear in rest, drove at his adversary with the eagerness of a man whose heart cries, "Now or never!"

But the black knight appeared to melt away before him. Adam thrust at a figure that shrank from the point of his spear. He had a vision of a crouching back and the hind hoofs of a horse glinting in the sunlight. That first blow had proved which of the two was the greater coward, and the black knight went away down the glade at a gallop, empty scabbard swinging, a crouching figure that fled away under the branches of the firs.

Adam reined in his horse, a man greatly astonished. He had blundered upon the truth that most men are inclined to be cowards, and that the war game goes to him who bluffs it out the best and gets in the first bold blow.

Then he discovered the red-haired girl holding to his stirrup strap.

"Thanks, messire; thanks, indeed! You gave the rogue a dog's blow. He was not worthy of good steel."

Her face was flushed and eager, and her brown eyes full of golden light. She looked up at Adam Gurden as though he was the bravest man in the whole world.

"Ah, messire—assuredly God sent you this way, and I bless your courage and your nobleness. You are of our party. Come; there is no time to lose!"

Adam felt as though a phial of quicksilver had been emptied into his blood. Queer thrills went through him as he looked into the girl's eyes.

"What would you have me do?"

She leant against his horse's shoulder, put her hands up and clasped his bridle arm.

"You are of our party; you are for Lancaster?"

Adam's cowardice began to be afraid of its fear.

"I am for Lancaster."

Her eyes flashed.

"Listen! Geoffrey of Keynton and his company have been ambushed, and put to the sword. Sir Mortimer caught him in the wilds, and now Sir Mortimer is marching for Reydon Manor with five hundred spears and three hundred archers at his back. They carry the banners and pennons that they took from Geoffrey of Keynton and his company, so that they may deceive our people, and strike my Lord Stugis a secret blow."

Adam sat straight and stiff in the saddle with the girl's hands clasped over his arm. The fierce, white eagerness of her face dazzled him.

"Who are you?" he asked her.

"I? I am my Lord Stugis' daughter. I was riding to warn my father, when three of Sir Mortimer's men fell in with me, and he in black was a traitor, and knew my face. The gentleman who was with me slew two of them before he himself was slain. I put my palfrey to it, and that traitor chased me through the woods."

Adam foresaw the fate that was falling upon him. He glanced at the lame palfrey, and then looked into the bleak face of his own fear.

The girl's hands tightened about his forearm.

"To Reydon! Oh, do not tarry."

Adam stared for a moment into the deep gloom under the firs.

"But—you?" he asked her.

"Do not think of me. I must lead poor Whitelock, and come on afoot. If the worst should happen, I will turn back towards Wistbury. Now—if you love God, and the cause—go!"

Something seemed to snap in Adam Gurden's heart. Recklessness, and a tumult of resolve, rushed over him. He lifted his salade, bent down, and looked into the girl's eyes.

"Before I go, tell me your name," he said.

Her upturned face covered him with a kind of radiance.

"Mellicent."

"Mellicent," he said, "pray for the heart of Adam Gurden."

Adam Gurden rode through the whirl of many emotions as he galloped back over Sowerby Moor. Now and again his fear kicked in him, feebly and despairingly like a drowning cur carried along by the tide. As he topped the moor he saw the steeple of Reydon Church pricking the blue of the September sky, and then the Reydon fields spreading towards the Ludden River. The green plain was stippled with steel-clad figures, whirling hither and thither like blown leaves in autumn. Adam's heart beat noisily as he held his horse well in hand down the further slope of the moor. The Yorkists had attacked my Lord of Stugis at Reydon; they had been repulsed, and were being hustled and driven in the retreat.

On a knoll north of Reydon village Adam saw my Lord of Stugis' banner blowing in the midst of a strong company of spears. And away by the silver loops of the Ludden River the sunlight flashed on the main mast of the Yorkist horse who were moving forward to cover the retreat of their comrades who had been repulsed from Reydon.

Fear made a last leap at Adam Gurden's throat. He shook it off, steadied himself, and struck the rough road at a gallop. In five minutes he was riding towards the knoll where the Lancastrian banner blew.

Adam reined in within ten paces of my Lord Stugis, who was mounted on a big roan horse. Tall men in battle harness towered round him with straight spears.

"My lord—a word with you. I bring news."

Lord Stugis had his visor up, and his swarthy, grizzled head showed in the shell of steel.

"News? Out with it!"

Adam answered him:

"Sir, the news is for you alone."

My lord drew out to him so that they were a little apart on the slope of the hill.

"Tell your news."

"Geoffrey of Keynton and his men have been routed. Sir Mortimer is not ten miles away with a strong force of archers and men-at-arms."

"How know you this?"

"Sir, your daughter met me with the news."

"S'death!—my daughter! And who are you?"

Adam Gurden lifted his salade.

"Sir, a man who, this morning, played the coward. A good Providence turned me back. I ask but one thing—that is, to be thrust into the van."

The Lord of Stugis looked at him grimly.

"A coward! Well, say not a word. Where did you leave my daughter?"

"Beyond Sowerby Moor. Her palfrey had gone lame. I galloped back at her bidding."

John of Stugis turned back towards his banner, and his company of knights and men-at-arms. He stood in his stirrups, and raised his sword.

"Sirs, follow me! Trumpets, sound the charge! Now, Sir Coward, let us see whether we fear death!"

Sensible men may, if they please, call Adam Gurden a fool for discovering courage in the sound of a girl's name. "Mellicent!" was his cry, as over the green meadows went the Lancastrian horse, a torrent of steel that rushed to sweep the Yorkists into the Ludden River. Before him Adam saw the mass of the Yorkist men-at-arms, a glittering hedge of spears, with a few archers scattered before them and shooting hurriedly and to no good purpose.

A mad gallop over the grass, a thundering of hoofs, a wild shout from many throats, and Adam could see the eyes of his foes behind their visors. Spears, shields and helmets, the tossing heads of horses, surged before him. Then came the clash of the steel ranks clanging together, and the fight was a chaos through which mad horses carried the men who rode them.

Adam found himself holding the truncheon of a splintered spear. A man in green harness stabbed at him. Adam smote him from the saddle with his broken spear, tossed it aside, and drew his sword. Someone struck at him from behind, but the blow clattered harmlessly from the backplate of his cuirass. There was no time to think of such a thing as fear, and Adam drove on, smiting and being smitten, and feeling the rush of men behind him.

He heard a shout. "A Stugis! A Stugis!"

A knot of Yorkists were twisted round John of Stugis and his banner-bearer, hemming them in on every side. Adam clapped in the spurs and rolled a Yorkist over with the charging chest of his horse. He smote his way valiantly into the scrimmage. Others followed, and my Lord and his banner were saved.

John of Stugis knew Adam by his shield. He touched him on the shoulder with the flat of his sword.

"Thanks, Sir Coward! Come, we must make an end!"

In half an hour from the first blowing of the trumpets on the knoll of Reydon village the Yorkists were scattering in rout over the meadows. Many tried to escape across the Ludden River, but were drowned therein by the weight of their harness. The Lancastrian trumpets sounded the rally. John of Stugis' men-at-arms began to gather about his banner that had been planted under an old ash tree.

Adam Gurden was at his side. They had fought shield by shield, and sword by sword.

"Sir Coward, what counsel do you give?"

Adam uncovered a hot and radiant face.

"Sir, let us ride over Sowerby Moor. We have Sir Mortimer to deal with."

"You are thirsting for more?"

"I have warmed to the work, sir. Noon is better than three o'clock in the morning."

So it befell that my Lord of Stugis and his Lancastrians fought two battles in one day, and won two victories—one by the Ludden River, the other upon Sowerby Moor. Sir Mortimer and his men, outmatched and outnumbered, broke and fled to the forestlands north of Wistbury town. The Lancastrians did not follow them into the forest, for the remnant of Sir Mortimer's archers would have galled them in the woods.

When Sir John had planted his banner on Sowerby Moor, and the men were disarming the prisoners and looking to the dead and wounded, a girl leading a white palfrey over the purple ling appeared against the blue of the sky. Sir John saw her when she was still a furlong away, and galloped to meet her over the moor.

Adam Gurden was helping to unarm a wounded knight, when Sir John's banner-bearer came and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Adam Gurden, my Lord has need of you."

And Adam followed the man to where Sir John and Mellicent were seated apart on a little knoll under the shelter of a bank of furze.

My Lord of Stugis had taken off his helmet, and his grizzled head had a sleek grimness that contrasted with Mellicent's red gleaming hair. He stared steadily at Adam with the air of a man who laughs behind an appearance of severity.

"Child, here is our friend—The Coward."

Mellicent's chin turned sharply towards her father.

"Coward! What a word to use!"

"It was he who used it first. Is not that so, Adam Gurden?"

Adam stood stiff in his battle-harness. He felt that those magical eyes were gazing at him, eyes like amber water kissed by the sun.

"My Lord speaks the truth," he said. Sir John laughed.

"There! it is as I told you."

She gave an impatient look.

"You are playing with me. I see the



(Drawn by JOHN CAMERON.)

“ ‘Kneel, Adam Garden,’ she said. And Adam knelt ” (p. 10).

jest. This gentleman fought Luke of Westwood, beat him, and saved me out of his hands. I doubt not that he would have slain him, had not the traitor fled."

Sir John looked curiously at Adam.

"What have you to say, my friend?"

"Sir, this morning I was a coward. Let the truth stand. But someone gave me back my courage. That is all that I can say."

Mellicent's eyes flashed with a kind of incredulous wonder. She rose, went towards Adam, and looked into his face.

"My father has told me how you fought to-day."

Adam bowed his head.

"And yet you say—you confess——"

"I confess that I was running away when I met you in the fir woods."

Mellicent drew a quick, deep breath.

"I do not believe it," she said. "A man who can tell such a truth cannot be a coward."

They heard Sir John break out into hearty, strenuous laughter.

"My man," said he, "say no more. When a woman will believe a certain thing, nothing will drive her from persisting in that belief. She will make you a brave man, any way."

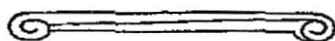
He drew his sword, and his swarthy face gleamed like the steel.

"Come, child! Shall we knight the gentleman? 'Tis in my power."

Mellicent looked at Adam.

"Kneel, Adam Gurden," she said.

And Adam knelt.



AD FINEM

By THEODOSIA GARRISON

I LIKE to think this friendship that we hold
 As Youth's high gift in our two hands to-day,
 Still shall we find as bright, untarnished gold
 What time the fleeting years have left us grey.
 I like to think we two shall watch the May
 Dance down her happy hills, and autumn fold
 The world in flame and beauty, we grown old
 Staunch comrades on an undivided way.

I like to think of winter nights made bright
 By book and hearth flame when we two shall smile
 At memories of to-day—we two content
 To count our vanished dawns by candlelight,
 Seeing we hold in our old hands the while
 That gift of gold Youth left us as she went.





(Drawn by JOHN CAMERON.)

“‘Let me pass,’ she cried to him” (p. 5).

38

Tristan of the Red Shield

There is no better writer of old-time romance than Mr. Deeping. Here is a story of early war, full of colour and strength

By Warwick Deeping



MAN on a black horse rode into Isca Solis an hour before the closing of the gates.

"The Grey Cow has a calf," he shouted to the captain of the guard. "Tristan of the Red Shield has beached his ship on the island."

The captain of the guard grinned at the man on the black horse.

"You will get a gold piece for such news."

"That's why this horse is sweating, my friend. The Great Shrew will pay." And he rode on up the street.

Isca Solis was ruled by a woman, and that woman Marcia the Roman, whom men called the Great Shrew. Her husband had been slain fighting heathen Saxons, but Isca Solis and the lands between the two seas had not lacked a tyrant because the chief was dead. His widow had taken his chair, worn his harness, and carried his sword. She was a virago, very comely with her black hair, fine eyes and white skin, strong as most men, and full of a fierce vanity that had never been chastened. All the women in her house were either plain or ancient. Even her chaplain had to roll his eyes and make her pretty speeches. Yet she would have nothing to say to the petty lords and chiefs who were so careless of their own peace that they dared to think that she needed a second husband. Gossip had it that she loved Tristan of the Red Shield, that great knight and spoiler of the heathen, and that she loved him out of sheer shrewishness because he had once called her a fool.

The man who carried the tidings of Tristan's coming to Britain reined his horse before the gate of Marcia's house.

"Master Porter—hallo!"

A big negro appeared, dressed in scarlet, with a silver staff in his hand.

"I carry news for the great lady."

"She is at the bath," said the negro.

"Give me your news and a woman shall carry it."

The man on the horse laughed. He was a shrewd fellow, with some knowledge of the world and of women.

"Go to perdition! The fruit is mine, and I will keep it fresh and pleasant. My lady shall have the news when she has finished her bathing."

He dismounted, fastened his horse's bridle to a ring in the wall, and sat down on the stone seat to wait.

Nor had he to wait long. The big negro had disappeared through the gate. He returned, scratching his woolly head and looking grieved.

"By the Prophets, she is in one of her rages. You can carry your news—and be welcome."

The Great Shrew was lying on an ebony couch in her garden, while one of her women combed her hair. The cushions of the couch were of crimson silk, and my lady's bath robe was the colour of saffron. She looked like a figure of fire in the midst of the green calm of the garden, with the westering sun shining on her above the sharp line of clipped yews.

The woman who had led the man into the garden stood aside, and he, being by no means a fool, bowed very low and looked abashed.

"Well, fellow?"

"Great lady, I carry news. It seemed good to me that I should bear it to you."

"Be quicker in the telling of it."

"I have a farm by the sea, and this morning I saw a ship standing in towards the Grey Cow. At first I thought she was a pirate ship, but, as I drew nearer, I saw that I had erred. The ship's sail was red, and the shield that hung at her prow was red."

Marcia's eyes seemed to catch a sudden fierce lustre.

"Well?"

"The ship took the beach in the bay under

the Grey Cow's head. Tristan of the Red Shield is ashore. It seemed to me that the news was big enough to be carried to Isca."

He folded his arms, bowed to her, and stood mute. And for a while the Great Shrew regarded him with those ominous dark eyes of hers.

"This is a very well-meaning rogue," she said presently. "Let the master of the slaves be called."

He was called and given his orders.

"Let this fellow have twenty blows of the scourge. He would spill the dish through being in too great a hurry."

So the carrier of the news had a scourging instead of a piece of gold.

Now at low tide a man could walk knee-deep from Grey Cow Island to the mainland, and had he of the black horse been in less of a hurry he might have seen Tristan of the Red Shield carried across from the island on a bed made of spear-staves and a sail. Four men bore this litter, while four more followed behind carrying wallets of food and their lord's arms. They climbed up from the beach and struck inland, heading north-west towards the Country of the Three Rivers.

Tristan of the Red Shield lay and stared at the clouds overhead. He was a tall man with blue eyes smouldering deep under a sun-tanned forehead. His hands lay crossed over his green tunic, below the red scarf that was fastened with a great brooch of gold. For Tristan of the Red Shield was sick. He had gotten a wound that would not heal, thanks to some heathen's javelin hurled at him in a sea-fight two months ago.

These men of his did not march towards Isca Solis where there were physicians and men skilled in the use of herbs.

"Carry me to Apple Island," he had said to them.

And since the men loved him they carried him all that day, four bearing the litter while the others rested. They were strong fellows, sea-tanned and lean, and they covered ten miles before the sun neared the west, following a Roman road that ran from sea to sea. Towards evening they turned aside by a wooden cross into a deep valley that was filled with the green of many great woods, a valley of sweet mystery when the sun shone and the month was June.

Here was Apple Island, lush soft country watered by many streams, and here the Lady

Igerna lived among her orchards, called by some a sorceress because she healed the sick.

When Tristan's men came to Apple Island they saw a great lady walking in the meadows with her two boarhounds following at her heels.

"It is Igerna herself, master."

Tristan turned his head.

"Go, one of you, and tell her who I am and why I have come."

They set the litter down beside a stream where yellow water-flags were in bloom, and Malgo, Tristan's armour-bearer, went to speak with the Lady Igerna.

"My master, lady, would be healed by you. A heathen javelin smote him through the muscles above the knee, and the wound will not heal."

She paused, with a great hound on either side of her, her hands resting on their heads.

"Who is your master?" she asked him, presently.

"Tristan of the Red Shield." And he showed her the red shield he carried with its boss of silver and its binding of brass.

Igerna gazed at it like one looking into a magic mirror. Her eyes grew dark with wonder; her lips moved, but no sound came from them. She seemed to stand in a trance, redreaming some strange dream.

"I knew that he would come to Apple Island," she said at last, "and in coming, he is welcome."

She drew near to the litter, her hounds following her, that dreaming look still in her eyes. As for Tristan, he bade his men raise him, and so waited her coming, wondering at her beauty, for he had thought to see a woman with grey hair. Her face had the adorable innocence of a child's merged in the deeper wisdom of the woman. Her hair was the colour of saffron, her eyes a deep grey darkened by long lashes. Pale skin and red lips were in quick contrast, and limbs moved under her apple-green robe like the muscles of a leopard under its tawny skin.

"Welcome, Sir Tristan."

She stood looking down at him with mysterious intentness, as though he had brought some strange and shadowy enchantment into her life. Her two hounds came and licked his hands. The omen was good. He fondled the dogs and gazed with a sudden awe at their mistress.

"I am here to ask a boon of you," he

TRISTAN OF THE RED SHIELD

said; "that you will set your hands to the healing of this wound of mine."

"What cunning I have shall be yours," she answered him. "But who bade you come to Apple Island when there are physicians at Isca?"

"I have no love for Isca. And the fame of you has spread—even to America. If you can heal me, I have a wonderful cup of gold——"

Her eyes looked into his.

"I do not work for hire, my lord. Let your men carry you to my house. It is yonder, among those orchards."

Tristan was lodged in a little pavilion built of wood in the garden of Igerna's villa. The place was covered with red and white roses, and through the doorway he could see the green lawns and the silver fish-ponds and the paved walk with its arcades where peacocks strutted up and down. Igerna rose at dawn and gathered the herbs that she needed before the dew had left them, and daily she and her woman dressed his wound with a poultice of herbs and a subtle powder that an old hermit had given her. Within three days the wound had begun to heal, but a more mysterious wound had opened in Tristan's heart. For love had smitten him, that great love that comes to a man but once this side of the grave.

As for Igerna, she was of Roman blood and proud, yet she walked alone more often in the orchards and the meadows. Sometimes she would stand and look at her own reflection in the softly flowing streams as though she would learn what manner of woman she was, and how Fate stretched its shadows over her. For a voice had cried in her heart:

"I dreamed a dream, and this is he."

And then she would press her hands to her bosom and stare at something a long way off, for that dream had shown her death and life striving together, and she knew not which had proved the victor.

Towards evening she would take her lute and sing, and Tristan, listening, would think of all the great deeds he would do for her sake and all the glory that he might win.

Yet when she ceased singing a voicelessness came upon him, because of the new marvel in his heart.

So silent was he that she rallied him thereon.

"Your sword is more eloquent than your tongue. Or do I frighten you, my lord?"

He drew a deep breath as he lay.

"I may seem no better than a clumsy boy. Yet a woman may be so strange and so terrible——"

She laughed mysteriously.

"Terrible! Perhaps the Lady of Isca——"

"That shrew! I would treat her as I would treat a man. Men are not humbled by such. Yet there is an enchantment that comes like a great light, be it at dawn or sunset or the flash of the storm."

She bent over her lute, for his eyes were shining at her out of the dusk.

"What is this terrible thing, my lord?"

"It is a beauty that walks the earth like a figure of fire. Never have I seen the woods so green or heard the birds sing so strangely at daybreak. And I have been a wanderer and a man of the sword; I have seen men die; I have seen broken ships sink in the sea. And yet—my heart is like water."

"You have been sick, my lord."

"Of that wound I am sick no longer."

She was silent, and he dared not speak.

"Never have I heard that Tristan of the Red Shield lacked courage. Never have I heard an evil word spoken of him. Ah! my lord, life and our dreams are very strange."

He stretched out a hand.

"What have you dreamt?"

"Long ago, and of that Red Shield of yours. But there was peril in that dream and the shadow of death."

"Speak to me, Igerna."

She rose, with a rapt look in her eyes.

"Some dreams may not be told, my lord, lest some mischance fall on the innocent. And yet—— Good night, my lord, I must go."

She passed out suddenly into the gathering dusk, and Tristan felt a strange exultation struggling in his throat. For the great God seemed good in giving him such a love and in filling the earth with such beauty.

Now, at Isca Solis the Great Shrew waited for news of Tristan, thinking in her vanity that he had come at last to woo her, but the days passed and there was no news of him, and Marcia grew restless. She sent a messenger to the Grey Cow with orders to find out whether Tristan had come in his ship or no.

The messenger from Isca learnt all that was needed. He found the red ship beached

and Tristan's shipmen at work cleaning her timbers and plugging seams. They told him without mistrust how their master had been carried to Apple Island and how the Lady Igerna was healing him of his wound.

The Shrew of Isca had the news that night and the fury stirred within her. She had heard of Igerna's beauty and had hated her for it, because her own vanity was so monstrous.

"Could we not have healed him in Isca?" she said to herself. And she began to brood and to make plans.

Before dawn broke a soldier on a bay horse rode out of Isca; the gates were mysteriously opened, nor did the guard ask questions. It was Marcia herself in helmet and cuirass, a sword at her side, hooded and cloaked in purple. She rode fast, with the daylight at her horse's heels and mad jealousy in her heart.

Three hours after noon she reached the Isle of Apples, and, making her way amid the woods, hid herself and her horse in a leafy place whence she could watch Igerna's house and the meadows and orchard about it. Her jealousy had its deserts, for she was shown that which she had feared to see—Tristan and Igerna walking alone in the meadows like lovers who tell their secrets.

They came close to the place where the Shrew of Isca had hidden herself, and there under the shade of a great oak tree Tristan took Igerna in his arms. Marcia saw them stand gazing into each other's eyes; she saw them kiss with the solemn, wondering passion of a mighty love. And her hate reared itself like a snake in the grass.

"Let the fools kiss," she said to herself. "In seven days that wench shall be lying at my feet."

She made no further tarrying, but rode like a madwoman back to Isca, not stopping to rest, for she was hardier in body than most men.

All Isca stood in fear of her, and the clergy and the lawyers were her creatures. She had not been in her great house an hour before she sent for Ambrose the Bishop.

He was a smooth man and a coward, a ready tool to her hand.

"I have found black sorcery in my country," she told him; "and it shall be stamped out. It is a woman; many are the tales that have come to me concerning

her, and at last I will prove them for myself."

Ambrose looked shocked.

"Who is the guilty soul?"

"The woman Igerna who lives in the Isle of Apples."

The Bishop nodded his head.

"I, too, have heard rumours. Let her be brought before our holy court, madam, that she may be examined and, if necessary, be given the ordeal of fire."

Marcia leant towards him and pointed with her finger.

"Priest, mark you, there are secrets known to me that would send you down to hell. This woman is a devil. See that she does not escape."

Ambrose bowed himself; the colour had left his face.

"Set her before us, madam, and she shall not escape."

"Nor shall you escape me, Sir Bishop, if any word of mine reaches other ears."

So Ambrose departed, and that night the captain of Marcia's guards rode with fifty men to the Isle of Apples.

"Bring back the woman," she had ordered them, "but fight not with Tristan of the Red Shield, for he is a man bewitched. And if by chance you see him not, leave these tablets that he may read them."

Tristan of the Red Shield had sent his men back to the ship, all save two—Malgo, his armour-bearer, and another. His wound had healed, and on the very day that Marcia's men marched for the Isle of Apples Tristan took a horse from Igerna's stables and rode out to try his strength. The day was far spent when he returned, to find that tragic things had happened.

Riding down from the woods he found Igerna's two hounds lying dead in a meadow, smitten with many spear wounds. The sound of the weeping of women reached him. Before the porch of the house Malgo and the sailor lay close together, all hacked and bloody, and dead as the two dogs.

As he drew up, a woman ran out of the house with a horror of these dead men in her eyes.

"My lord, my lord, they have taken away my mistress!"

The pupils of Tristan's eyes showed red as blood.

"Speak, woman!"

"The Great Shrew sent soldiers from Isca and seized her for sorcery. Your men

TRISTAN OF THE RED SHIELD

fought and were slain. Their captain left these sealed tablets for you, my lord."

"Give them to me."

He broke the seal and read what Marcia had scratched upon the wax:

"I go about to save you. An evil beast holds you bewitched, but she shall die. Beware, Tristan of the Red Shield! I am a fierce enemy, but I love those who love me. Go, cleanse yourself, be shriven, and out of my great favour I will look kindly upon you.—MARCIA."

Tristan broke the tablets on the stones.

"Which way did they ride, woman?"

"To Isca."

"How many hours have passed?"

"Three, my lord. And the men were many and well armed."

He flung out of the saddle and went to the garden house for his shield and sword. Then he mounted his horse and rode away.

"Be of good cheer," he shouted back. "Your lady shall live. I swear it."

Tristan was out of luck that night, for his horse was tired and the darkness soon smothered him. He knew that he could not overtake Marcia's men before they reached Isca, and that the city was too strong and Marcia's power too great for him to do anything against her with the crew of one ship. So, being wise despite his love-wrath, he turned towards the sea, and by dawn reached the island where his ship lay.

Now Tristan had a very cunning fellow who could speak many tongues and mimic any man from king to beggar. This fellow he sent as a spy to Isca, bidding him discover what had befallen Igerna and what



"If Igerna dies I will have you thrown over that cliff"

was passing in the city. But Tristan bade his men get the ship ready for sea, while he hid himself and his horse in a wood not far from the coast, and food was brought to him from the island.

In two days Tristan's spy returned and told what he had learnt in Isca. Igerna was shut up in the Black Tower, and the tower was strongly guarded. Isca itself was full of soldiers. The gossips had it that the Lady Igerna was to be brought as a sorceress before Ambrose the Bishop; that she would be condemned to the ordeal, and that her beauty would be her death.

Now those who had followed Tristan on his adventures had learnt to wonder at his shrewdness, for like the great Odysseus he was a master of craft as well as of the sword. The day after his spy's return he set off very early in the morning, riding alone. His way lay towards Isca, but he turned aside to visit the cell of a famous hermit, an old man who had been a soldier in the days of Arthur the King.

Tristan told the hermit the truth, and the hermit befriended him with subtle goodwill. He anointed Tristan with oil, gave him the heel bone of a saint to hang about his neck, and sent him away with smiling solemnity.

"Behold, the sorcery has been driven out of you, my son. Go and pray in the great church at Isca, and show yourself to Ambrose the Bishop. Fare you well."

There was a great stir in the city when Tristan of the Red Shield rode into Isca Solis. People ran to see so great a warrior who had fought and vanquished the heathen at Glevum and Sorbiodunum. But Tristan rode through the crowd to the great church and, leaving his horse in the courtyard, entered and knelt before the great altar.

People crowded in to get a glimpse of him, and the news was spread about the city.

"Tristan of the Red Shield is praying in the church of St. Alban."

Marcia heard the news and smiled over it. Bishop Ambrose mounted his white mule and rode down to bless so noble a worshipper.

Before the altar Tristan played his part, kneeling before Ambrose and making a confession.

"Good father, I had sorcery laid upon me by a woman in the Isle of Apples. But the spell is broken, and Jude the Hermit has cleansed me of sin. He bade me wear

this holy relic and ride and show myself to you, and behold I am here."

Ambrose the sycophant rejoiced.

"My blessing is upon you, son Tristan, and she who has worked this spell shall suffer. Rise and go your way."

Tristan kissed the Bishop's ring, rose, marched out of the crowded church of St. Alban the Martyr and, mounting his horse, rode slowly to Marcia's palace.

She had word of his coming, for Ambrose mounted his mule and rode so fast down a side street that he was with the Great Shrew before Tristan reached the gate.

"Here is a wonderful thing, madam—Tristan has come to us as a penitent."

"Wonderful indeed! You fool, am I of no account?"

"But there has been sorcery. He confesses it."

"Your task will be the easier, my friend."

Then the black porter came crying, "Sir Tristan of the Red Shield is at the gate."

Ambrose fled at a flash from the Shrew's eyes.

"Let Sir Tristan enter. Let him be brought in with all honour. Hasten."

Tristan was led along the great corridor to the summer room whose windows looked through a vine-hung colonnade into the garden. Marcia was alone, half lying on a couch that was covered with cloth of scarlet and gold. And Tristan stood before her with an abashed and wondering look, like a man astonished by her beauty.

"Welcome to Isca."

He bowed himself before her.

"Great lady, strange things have befallen me; things so strange that I know not how to speak to you."

She smiled and cast a pillow on the ground close to her feet.

"Be seated, Tristan. Nay, why look so shy of me?"

"Lady, have I been freed from one spell but to fall under another?"

"It is as God wills. I am a woman and no enchantress."

"But to me it seems that you are both."

He spun a cunning tale to her of how he had dreamed of Isca, and how Igerna had thrown a distant spell on him and drawn him to Apple Island. And in a little while he was making love to Marcia with an abashed innocence that was very subtle. Nor was he scolded for his passionate looks. The woman's hot vanity and her desire of him turned her into an exultant fool.

TRISTAN OF THE RED SHIELD

That night she made a great feast for Tristan, and the wine shone in her bold eyes. She drank to him before them all.

"To the staunchest knight in Christendom!"

And Tristan pledged her in return:

"To the fairest lady in all the land!"

Then the devil of vanity seemed to break loose in her. She ordered their cups to be filled, and, raising hers towards Tristan, looked challengingly into his eyes.

"To the death and shame of Igera the Sorceress!"

Tristan echoed her without flinching:

"Death to the sorceress; long life to the Lady of Isca!"

So Marcia, arrogant fool, felt herself triumphant; even began to believe in the sorcery of which she had dreamed for her own ends. And Tristan played to her vanity with all the craft of an Odysseus. He knew that Igera could not be saved by the sword; the Black Tower was too strong and too well guarded.

On the day that followed he stood before Marcia as a cunning and an eager lover.

"I have a boon to ask."

"Be not afraid to ask it."

Forthwith he began to tell her of the red ship lying beached on the island, and how he had in his cabin a magic cup that he had brought from Ireland.

"And those that pledge each other from that cup love as few mortals love."

He looked at her meaningly.

"If my lady would come with me to the Grey Cow and drink from that cup——"

She held out a hand for him to kiss.

"To Tristan, I cannot refuse so sweet a boon."

For a while he could hardly believe that such a treacherous shrew could be so credulous, but there was nothing for him to do but to brave it out and trust in her infatuation. It was agreed between them that they should ride next day towards the sea, and that Tristan should make a feast for her upon his ship. All that night he lay awake, suspecting treachery and some deed of malignant cunning.

But dawn came, and before the sun was high in the heavens Tristan found himself riding with Marcia along the road to the sea. A dozen of her guards followed them, and Tristan carried his sword and shield. He was thinking of Igera awaiting death in the Black Tower, and of Malgo, his armour-bearer, slain in the Isle of Apples.

The wind freshened and the sky filled with clouds as they neared the sea, and Tristan began to be troubled lest his plan should miscarry. But he played the gay and passionate lover, riding very close to Marcia and looking longingly in her eyes.

"The wind is wooing you," he said.

She laughed, unfastened the silk bands that bound her hair and let it blow wild. They were riding down a narrow valley, and Grey Cow Island showed ahead, with the poop of the red ship jutting out beyond a grey cliff.

"How are we to ferry over?"

"My strength is as great as my love. And by my love I will carry you."

His audacity seemed to please her.

"I am not a little woman."

"Nor am I a little man."

"But the water is deep."

"The tide is not full yet."

They rode down to the beach and dismounted, and Marcia looked into Tristan's eyes.

"Carry me through the sea and you shall win my love."

"So be it," he said.

Big woman that she was, he lifted her and set her upon his shoulder under the eyes of her men, and, wading out into the sea, pressed forward towards the island. A grim exultation seized him, for Marcia had waved her men back. And yet he hated her as he had never hated her before, for she seemed to ride him as though he were a beast, and this was her triumph.

The waves washed about his arm-pits and drenched the hem of Marcia's robe, but she laughed with a kind of insolence and gripped his hair with one hand.

"Am I not rich plunder?" she said.

Then Tristan's wrath blazed. He had no more than twenty yards to go, and his men were waiting.

"Look back, woman," he said, "for you may never set foot on that beach again. I have taken my hostage, and God is just."

She gave a fierce cry.

"What mean you?"

"I hold your life for the life of Igera. If she dies you die also."

Then the Great Shrew showed her temper, for a sudden great fear had seized her. She screamed to her guards, and began to fight with the ferocity of a savage. Her hands clawed at Tristan's eyes.

He had to save himself, for she was monstrous strong, and so he tumbled her into

the sea and dragged her after him by her arms. She was half-drowned and voiceless when he got her ashore where his men were waiting with their bows and javelins.

Several of Marcia's guards had ridden into the surf, but a flight of arrows from Tristan's men discouraged them. The Shrew of Isca Solis had met her master.

Tristan bade his men take a stout post and drive it into the earth at the top of the cliff. He had Marcia lashed to this post in full view of her guards who were watching from the mainland.

"Now hear my judgment," he said to her. "If Igerna dies I will have you thrown over that cliff; but if Igerna is brought safely to this island, then you shall not be harmed. Your men cannot save you, for even if an army comes out against us I shall slay you before their eyes."

She defied him.

"Do your worst, you false hound!"

"Stand there and consider," he answered her. "But if you love your life you will call the captain of your guard and send him to Isca with a command that Igerna shall be brought to this island. And if you seek to deal treacherously with me, before God you shall die."

For fully half a day the Great Shrew stood there in her wet robes with the sea wind chilling her before she surrendered. For Tristan sat on a rock near her with his drawn sword, and there was death in his eyes.

"Have your way, fool!" she said bitterly. "I could have made you the greatest king in Britain."

The captain of the guards was suffered to come to the island. Marcia gave him her signet ring and her orders, and Tristan warned him against treachery.

"Your mistress will die unless these commands are obeyed."

So Marcia's guards rode back to Isca, and all that night Tristan watched beside the Shrew, while his men held the beach. Never a word did Marcia speak to him despite the cold and the wind, for her malign wrath was like a live flame burning her jealous soul.

With the dawn Tristan ordered half his men to get aboard the ship and stand ready, nor had they long to wait. A party of horse-men came riding down to the shore, with Igerna in their midst. The tide was low and Tristan went half-way to meet them, after posting a trusty man with a naked sword beside the Shrew.

"Man, I will give thee a helmet full of gold if you will loose these bonds," she whispered to him.

"I would sooner send your head a-flying," he answered her bluntly.

The captain of Marcia's guards took the bridle of Igerna's horse and led her to Tristan.

"My lord, here is the lady, unharmed."

"Ride back, sir, and wait over yonder."

Tristan lifted Igerna from the saddle and carried her on his shoulder to the island.

"Dear heart," he said, "I had brought your near to death."

"My life is yours; do with it what you please."

"Then will I steal it," he said, "as the noblest treasure in all Britain."

He carried her aboard the red ship, and his men followed him. The cable was loosed and the great sail unfurled, while the rowers bent to their oars.

Tristan held the tiller.

"Come and stand by me, Igerna."

He set an arm about her and looked up at Marcia on the cliff.

"Let her own men unrope her," he said, "and let her be humbled, for there was no pity in her heart."



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